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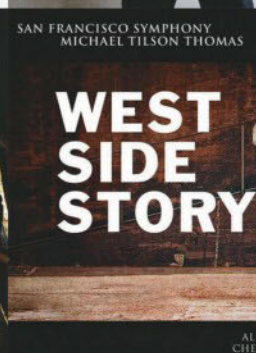
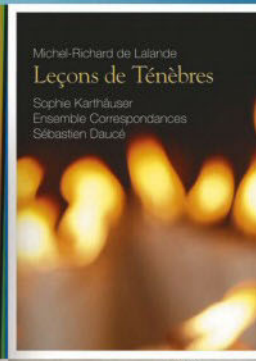
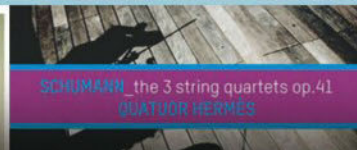
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RECORDINGS & EVENTS *A special eight-page section for readers in the US and Canada*

GRAMOPHONE *talks to...*

Cellist Andrew Yee...

...about the Attacca Quartet's new Haydn *Seven Last Words* disc

A new recording, but also a new version?

It's a piece I've really loved for a very long time, and listened to constantly, but we didn't play it for several years. When we did, we were surprised by how different the music was from all of the versions that I'd heard. The 'original' is for full orchestra, with the string quartet, piano and oratorio versions arranged 10 years after the premiere. I don't think there are any quartet recordings out there that haven't changed at least something very small. It's getting to the point where there are becoming traditions in what quartets are willing to change.

But what about Haydn's own version?

I think at some point somebody asked Haydn if he could make a home version of it. And he said, 'sure'; I don't think he thought very much about it. My arrangement is very much just another 'home version', which I've made myself but also made very public!

It was made in collaboration with your Attacca Quartet colleagues...

Yes, after listening to all the other versions we looked at the score and I wrote down as many changes as possible. Then we sat down over a

period of weeks, playing the standard version then this revised version. We'd have a serious chat about whether it was making the music better or whether it was just a change for its own sake. We didn't want to make it sound like an arrangement; we wanted to make it sound as close to Haydn's work as possible.

And Haydn's a composer the Attacca knows very well...

We're reaching the end of a cycle of all the quartets in concert, and have done 60 of the 68. It's starting to feel real. In the beginning doing all of them just seemed like an interesting idea. Midway through, though, we realised that it was a larger project than we ever imagined. But we've fallen in love with how Haydn writes for the quartet. There isn't a single piece that doesn't feel like it was crafted with love. But when we came across the music for the *Seven Last Words*, it didn't feel like it had that love necessarily all the way through.

But why record the *Seven Last Words* and not any of the other quartets?

We were about three years into the Haydn project and had just released our album of



John Adams's complete quartets, when we were wondering what to record next. Haydn seemed the obvious choice for us. But it gets tricky when you're putting together a disc – do you put out a selection or do you put out a whole opus? Then someone suggested the *Seven Last Words*. All the Haydn quartets are amazing works, especially the slow movements. But that's why the *Seven Last Words* is so amazing. You start off with the introduction and then you have a series of the most gorgeous slow movements you've ever heard, back to back.

And your arrangement's all still Haydn?

Everything we did was out of respect for Haydn; a version where no one would really know we'd done anything – that was the goal.

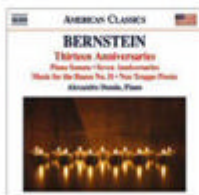
Bernstein

Piano Sonata. *Seven Anniversaries*.

Thirteen Anniversaries. Music for the Dance No 2. *Non troppo presto*

Alexandre Dossin *pf*

Naxos American Classics © 8 559756 (61' • DDD)



Although Leonard Bernstein was an excellent pianist (at least when on form)

and usually composed at the keyboard, he wrote relatively little solo piano music in relation to his better known symphonic and

music theatre output. His groups of *Anniversaries* are simply collected short pieces written in tribute to colleagues, friends and family members. They teem with clever harmonic twists and metric surprises, yet stay within simple, immediately communicative bounds. By the time the *Seven Anniversaries* of 1943 appeared, Bernstein's melodic personality had already begun to take shape, and was fully formed within the period between the Sixties and Eighties from which the *Thirteen Anniversaries*, published in 1988, were culled.

By contrast, the Sonata, Bernstein's largest solo keyboard effort, dates from his

late teens. The opening movement evokes Copland's declamatory keyboard gestures and the brooding canvas of Shostakovich's Fifth Symphony, while the *Largo*'s sombre phrases update the opening section of Ravel's G major Concerto slow movement. The brief, previously unrecorded *Non troppo presto* and three-movement *Music for the Dance* No 2 similarly reveal the teenage Bernstein's sophisticated ear, assurance and wit.

Pianist Alexandre Dossin's polished, idiomatic and well-recorded performances hold their own alongside Alexander Frey's 'complete' 1998 Bernstein piano music cycle (Koch, 8/99 – nla), although I prefer

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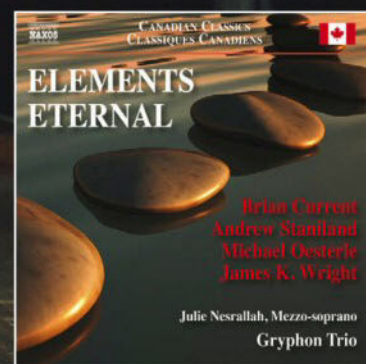


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The Brooklyn-based Knights, who offer a wide-ranging programme on their new disc for Warner Classics (review on page V)

the driving momentum of the latter's faster, more incisive tempo in the first movement of the Sonata. What is more, Frey includes the *Four Anniversaries* (1948), *Five Anniversaries* (1964) and *Touches* (1980) omitted here: might Dossin plan them for a future release? **Jed Distler**

Haydn

Seven Last Words of Christ on the Cross

(arr Yee/Attacca Quartet)

Attacca Quartet

Azica © ACD71299 (63' • DDD)



Sixty-eight numbered Haydn string quartets evidently weren't enough for the adventurous and curious musicians of the Attacca Quartet. They added a 69th to their repertoire when they devised a new arrangement of the composer's *Seven Last Words of Christ on the Cross*, one of his most unusual (and flexible) scores. Haydn originally wrote the work for orchestra and later revised it for string quartet and then as an oratorio. He also sanctioned a version for solo piano.

This incarnation, by Attacca cellist Andrew Yee with input from his colleagues,

is based on the oratorio, with subtle changes to clarify textures and heighten thematic elements. Chorales precede six of the seven sonatas that make up the main body of the work, and Lee has made a transcription of the second introduction, originally for wind ensemble. Most of the hour-long score is meditative and grave, in the most affecting Haydn tradition, though there are moments – as in Sonata V – that juxtapose graciousness with dramatic ferocity. And then comes the brief final movement, a Haydn force of nature, literally: the music depicts an earthquake.

The Attacca Quartet explore the work's range of expressive moods with utmost sensitivity to nuance and interplay. The music challenges the players to shape long lines, emphasise contrasting material and occasionally stop to take a big breath. They triumph in every respect, and are captured in such vivid sound that no telling Haydn detail is allowed to go unheard.

Donald Rosenberg

Paine

'Orchestral Works, Vol 2'

Symphony No 2, 'In the Spring', Op 34.

Oedipus Tyrannus, Op 35 - Prelude.

Poseidon and Amphitrite, Op 44

Ulster Orchestra / JoAnn Falletta

Naxos American Classics © 8 559748 (68' • DDD)



The second volume in the Ulster Orchestra's series devoted to orchestral music by

John Knowles Paine with conductor JoAnn Falletta introduces three works that deserve more than the occasional dusting. The Symphony No 2, Prelude to *Oedipus Tyrannus* and *Poseidon and Amphitrite* show how skilfully Paine (1839-1906) absorbed the lessons of celebrated Romantic composers and went on to create scores of fresh appeal.

The spirit of Schumann hovers over the Symphony No 2 in A, and not only because it bears the subtitle *In the Spring*. The music is reminiscent of the German composer's *Spring Symphony* in its effulgent lyricism, rollicking humour and harmonic palette. But the writing is so lustrous and Paine ties everything together with such seamless mastery that you can't help but be charmed. The slow movement is a thing of tender beauty and fervent drama, with lovely solos for horn and oboe.

Paine taught a generation of American composers at Harvard; and while his own music – at least as presented here – hardly sounds 'American', it must have provided inspiration for his students. Certainly

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CD759: "The Westwood Wind Quintet offers yet another tour de force. [The pieces] touch all the bases, from reflective to rollicking and from reassuring to gently subversive. The group plays with both virtuosity and remarkable empathy throughout." (Intl. Rcd. Review) Exciting music by Tschemberdschi, Ripper, Berger, Hartley, and Kosins.



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Oedipus Tyrannus is a model of descriptive writing, and a similar command of atmosphere and poetic possibility fills the pages of *Poseidon and Amphitrite*, which is subtitled *An Ocean Fantasy*.

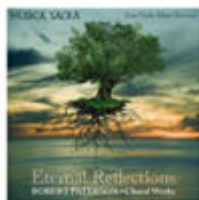
Falletta shapes each score with a fine sense of pacing and balance, making sure that the intimate aspects of Paine's art receive as much attention as its majestic sonorities. The playing of the Ulster Orchestra is at turns refined and robust. **Donald Rosenberg**

R Paterson

Eternal Reflections. A New Eearth – Choral Suite. Lux aeterna. The Essence of Gravity. Snow Day. Did you hear?. Life is but a Dream. A Dream Within a Dream

Musica Sacra / Kent Tritle

American Modern Recordings © AMR1040 (75' • DDD)



Robert Paterson could probably set a telephone book to music and create

something that captivates. Luckily, he chooses much better texts, as can be heard on this beguiling disc of the American composer's choral music performed by Musica Sacra, the New York-based chorus. The settings range from serious ruminations on life, death, religion, war and nature to lighter fare exploring dreams and teenage attitudes.

Eternal Reflections, which gives the disc its title, reveals Paterson's ability to treat words with utmost clarity and send them soaring or engaging in deft choral conversation. The writing is tonal but never predictably so, with subtle touches of dissonance to colour the atmospheres and emotions.

Paterson evokes the motion of sea and aura of nature in the Choral Suite from *A New Eearth* [sic], four movements of affecting and beautiful sonic layers, and the only work on the disc with piano accompaniment. Elsewhere, Paterson embraces word-painting (sounds of guns and machines in *The Essence of Gravity*); depicts the bright, conflicted chatter of teenagers (to David Cote's texts in *Snow Day* and the rumour-laden *Did you hear?*); tweaks a beloved nursery rhyme (*Life is but a Dream*); and transforms a Poe poem to rapturous effect (*A Dream Within a Dream*).

As shaped by Music Director Kent Tritle, the myriad hues, lyricism and nobility in Paterson's music emerge in all their splendour. The choristers of Musica Sacra

lift their lines from the page, bringing passionate and lucid life to the varied challenges. **Donald Rosenberg**

Rochberg

'Complete Flute Music, Vol 1'

Caprice Variations. Slow Fires of Autumn (Ukiyo-e II)^a. Between Two Worlds (Ukiyo-e III)^b
Christina Jennings fl

^aJune Han ^{hp} ^bLura Johnson ^{pf}

Naxos American Classics © 8 559776 (59' • DDD)



This first of two volumes devoted to Rochberg's music for flute pays homage to

a composer who represents an important source of America's deep musical roots. In producing the disc, flautist Christina Jennings also acknowledges her father Andrew, second violinist of the Concord String Quartet, for whom Rochberg in 1971 wrote his radically conservative, game-changing Third Quartet.

Jennings's playing of 21 transcriptions from Rochberg's 50 *Caprice Variations* for solo violin, based on Paganini's 24th Caprice and written in 1970, is a less edgy, more conventionally seductive experience than the originals. Jennings mentions eight composers as being referenced, including Bach, Mahler, Bartók and Schoenberg, but leaves out one I hear, Saint-Saëns.

Written a decade later, the two *Ukiyo-e* pieces, which 'grew out' of a harp piece inspired by Japanese woodblock illustrations, are formal, abstract and pleasing affairs. The piano plays a minor role in *Between Two Worlds* but the harp plays a prominent one in *Slow Fires of Autumn*, a striking adventure in which Jennings and June Han make music that is rich with accents of koto and shakuhachi. In concert, Jennings fades to silence in *Slow Fires* 'while spinning around'; even without the visuals, the effect is stunning. The recording, made at the American Academy of Arts and Letters in New York City, is miked just right to catch Jennings's multicoloured nuances of tone and phrase. **Laurence Vittes**

'The Ground Beneath Our Feet'

JS Bach Concerto for Violin and Oboe, BWV1060R **Jacobsen/Aghaei** Concerto for Santur and Violin **Reich** Duet

The Knights ...The Ground Beneath Our Feet

Stravinsky Dumbarton Oaks

The Knights

Warner Classics © 2564 61709-8 (75' • DDD)



Enterprising programming is a hallmark of The Knights, the

orchestral collective based in Brooklyn, New York; 'The Ground Beneath Our Feet' explores various aspects of the concerto grosso. All of the music hails from the 20th or 21st century, except for Bach's Concerto for violin and oboe. You can feel the collaborative energy, especially in the works that end the disc: the Concerto for santur, violin and orchestra by Knights co-founder Colin Jacobsen and Iranian composer Siamak Aghaei, and ...*The Ground Beneath Our Feet*, written by ensemble members. The concerto is full of hypnotic and vivacious Middle Eastern references and deft interaction between violin (Jacobsen) and santur, a hammered dulcimer (Aghaei). The musical sources in ...*The Ground Beneath Our Feet*, with its repeated bass on the *Ciaccona* by Tarquinio Merula, range from jazz and salsa to raga and reels. It's an infectious concoction, played with zesty abandon.

The recording was made during live concerts at Dumbarton Oaks, the estate in Washington DC where Stravinsky's eponymous concerto received its premiere in 1937 under Nadia Boulanger. It's an ideal work for a conductorless ensemble of keen rhythmic instincts and virtuoso flair, which The Knights possess in abundance. They also bring cohesive vibrancy to Steve Reich's *Duet* for two violins and strings, with Ariana Kim and Guillaume Pirard as soloists, and stylish buoyancy and lyricism to the Bach concerto, in which violinist Johnny Gandelmann and oboist Adam Hollander do the honours. **Donald Rosenberg**

'Powerhouse Pianists II'

Adams Hallelujah Junction

Childs Kilter **Corigliano** Chiaroscuro

Harberg Tenement Rhapsody – Subway

Opel Dilukkenjon **Paterson** Deep Blue Ocean

Rzewski Winnsboro Cotton Mill Blues

Stephen Gosling, Blair McMillen *pfs*

American Modern Recordings © AMR1039

(70' • DDD)



It's taken five years to release this 2010 studio recording of a new music programme that I heard Stephen Gosling and Blair McMillen play live in New York – see my

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This 1982 live recording features four of the greatest violinists collaborating on Vivaldi's *The Four Seasons*, as well as works by Bach and Mozart. Zubin Mehta leads the Israel Philharmonic.



Tchaikovsky: Ballet Suites
Berlin Philharmonic | Mstislav Rostropovich
"The Nutcracker suite is enchanting; the Sugar-plum Fairy is introduced with ethereal gracefulness, the Russian Dance has marvelous zest and the Waltz of the Flowers combines warmth and elegance with an exhilarating vigour."
— Penguin Guide



Brahms: 21 Hungarian Dances
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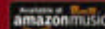
Mahler: Symphony No. 1
Orchester des Bayerischen Rundfunks | Rafael Kubelík
"Kubelík gives an intensely poetic reading. He is here at his finest in Mahler" — Penguin Guide



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MUSICA SACRA Kent Tritle, Music Director

Eternal Reflections Choral Works • ROBERT PATERSON

"Musica Sacra's program opened with Robert Paterson's gorgeous *Lux Aeterna*... Tautly scored with vivid contrasts and soaring lines, the work proved a highlight of the program."
— *The New York Times*

"Robert Paterson is among the modern day masters who is making sure that the world of choral music continues to expand... they overwhelmingly deserve to be a standard choice in the repertoire of choral ensembles..." — *AXS.com*

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Mary Elizabeth Bowden: radiant in new repertoire for trumpet and varied accompaniments on her new disc

blog at gramophone.co.uk/blog/piano-notes/powerhouse-pianists-on-hot-june-nights – but the wait was worth it.

The performance is consistently fluent, meticulous, inspired and well recorded. Robert Paterson's triptych *Deep Blue Ocean* starts with jazzy evocations, slips into Messiaen's stained-glass harmony, goes salsa, then concludes with expansive pop 'power' chords that gently pulsate: a fun, uninhibited piece. Doug Opel's *Dilukkenjon* is a stylistic pudding packed with dissonant repetition, post-minimal noodling and lyrical episodes that seem more forced than inevitable. By contrast, Amanda Harberg's 'Subway' splices and dices rock/blues clichés into fresh, unpredictable patterns. Mary Ellen Child's *Kilter* is a carefully crafted large-scale work characterised by repeated notes and a kind of Asian modality. Gosling and McMillen take the opening section slower and more suggestively than in Anthony de Mare and Kathleen Supové's slightly faster, more incisive 1995 recording (XI Records).

Such is John Corigliano's unerring ear for effective keyboard textures in *Chiaroscuro* that the tuning of the two pianos a quarter-tone apart never sounds gimmicky. This performance is no less marvellous than the Oppens/Lowenthal version (Cedille, 10/11^{US}), although I prefer the lighter and brighter third movement in McMillen's earlier recording with pianist

Sachiko Kato (Centaur). John Adams's energetic yet arguably overlong *Hallelujah Junction* has never sounded better on disc, while *Winnsboro Cotton Mill Blues* has the edge over the composer's own recording with Oppens (Music & Arts) for Gosling and McMillen's pinpoint *détaché* articulation of the churning bass-register clusters. Highly recommended. **Jed Distler**

'Radiance'

Barber Three Songs, Op 10^a Hallman Trumpet Sonata^a D Ludwig Radiance^b McMichael Totem Voices^a J Stephenson 'Croatian' Trio^c Turrin Arabesque^d. Escapade^a. Fandango^e Mary Elizabeth Bowden *tpts* Mercedes Smith *fl* David Bilger *tpt* Zenas Kim-Banther *tbn* Zoë Martin-Doike, Miho Saegusa *vns* Frank Shaw *va* Jiyoung Lee *vc* Edward Paulsen *db* ad Alexandra Carlson, Milana Strezeva *pf* Summit © DCD655 (73' • DDD)



friends, Mary Elizabeth Bowden makes a pitch for the trumpeter and piccolo trumpeter crowd with her debut CD. Although it's mostly repertoire that only a trumpet player could truly, profoundly and

deeply love, it is splendidly played and, except for Samuel Barber's *Three Songs*, Op 10, entirely by 'living, working' American composers.

The best is James Stephenson's erratically stylish, 13-minute *Croatian* Trio, written for the annual brass festival in Velika Gorica, south of Zagreb, in which Bowden, flautist Mercedes Smith and pianist Milana Strezeva hang with cool, indivisibly classical/jazz sounds. Bowden does her best work here. The most infectious, high-energy music comes from Joseph Turrin: his *Arabesque* for two trumpets gives Bowden and David Bilger an opportunity to fool indecently around; his *Fandango* for trumpet and trombone introduces trombonist Zenas Kim-Banther, of Rodney Marsalis's Philadelphia Big Brass, who makes an eloquent partner in unfamiliar tonal terrain.

The title-track, *Radiance*, an adaptation of David Ludwig's plaintive soliloquy for oboe and strings, shows just how chaste and radiant a piccolo trumpet can be, while the 'Hypnotic' slow movement of Joseph Hallman's Sonata is true to its name, studded with radiant moments of its own. Saginaw-based Catherine McMichael's *Totem Voices* gently invokes wolf, whale and mosquito, and the third of the transcribed Barber songs, 'I hear an army', is a brilliant audiophile track at high volume.

Laurence Vittes

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Navigating uncharted waters for recording

Last month was bookended by two events to offer tonic to anyone beset by pessimism about the classical musical world. First came the Royal Philharmonic Society Awards, a celebration of live music-making in the UK – in many ways the live equivalent of our *Gramophone* Awards. Sir Antonio Pappano, receiving the 100th RPS Gold Medal, spoke movingly of how his most memorable musical experiences have not been, for example, an ovation after an opening of renown, but when engaged in outreach and education to the young and uninitiated. Pappano described it as 'that magical moment where interest is first sparked'; talk to many musicians, be they luminaries or lesser-sung heroes in orchestral ranks or education departments, and you will find that same passion. All of us – listeners, labels, opinion formers, parents, politicians – must do all we can to support them in this most vital of missions.

The month ended with an invigorating and intensive few days at Classical:NEXT, a gathering where labels, journalists, entrepreneurs and artists meet, share plans, debate challenges, draw conclusions, and pave the way ahead for the months and years to come. It was held this year, for the first time, in Rotterdam. Setting aside that such events are always somewhat self-selecting – only those with enthusiasm, initiative and ideas tend to attend them – it was still heartening to be surrounded by so much passion and optimism for recorded music-making. Release schedules for the months to come look every bit as enticing as the year past; challenges, though real, are being met as people find new ways



Martin

to work together and to reach audiences. Which is how it's always been.

At one extreme lie experiments in virtual reality concert-going, at the other, pragmatic approaches to funding which ensure many fine records will thankfully still be made in the same old way by the same old labels.

In the middle lies digital listening. It was an amusing reminder of just how far into the digital era we are that the marketing material of streaming service Qobuz contained the phrase 'good old downloads' – that compared to the heady new waters of streaming, the download is now a traditional safe haven. That conference sessions on metadata and digital concert halls were scheduled and held with no particular fanfare shows that such issues are simply the mainstream now. The agreement required for all to move happily full steam ahead towards the brave new world of streaming still seems some way off, but many are heading there anyway, with differing degrees of willingness and excitement: the winners are the listeners.

Not far away from the conference venue, a little downtown and downriver, lies Europe's largest port. Much has buffeted maritime fortunes in recent eras – air travel has obliterated distance, telecoms render travel less necessary – yet cranes still load and unload, people gather and disperse, ever more modern vessels sail past thrillingly contemporary dockland buildings. Much changes, but the basic spirit continues much as it has done since man first enquired what lay beyond his own limited horizons and went exploring. Which isn't a bad analogy for music, really.

martin.cullingford@markallengroup.com

THIS MONTH'S CONTRIBUTORS



'I'm generally not a fan of 4am starts, but my trip to Munich to interview Arabella Steinbacher was

worth the bleary eyes. She had only just got back from a tour but had lots to say about the Tchaikovsky Concerto.' **ARIANE TODES**, former Editor of *The Strad* who blogs at elbowmusic.org, wrote this month's Musician and the Score.



'Having worked at length on Wagner and Britten, I've long been fascinated by the composer-

conductor phenomenon,' says **ARNOLD WHITTALL**, who wrote the Contemporary Composer article this month. 'Esa-Pekka Salonen is one of the most prominent modern practitioners of this demanding dual role.'



'It was a thrill to pop over to Munich to meet Jonas Kaufmann again, and find him as relaxed and good-

natured as ever. To have such an articulate and thoughtful man as an interviewee is a joy for any journalist – the copy almost wrote itself.' **WARWICK THOMPSON** writes about opera for blouinartinfo.com and *Opera* magazine.

Gramophone, which has been serving the classical music world since 1923, is first and foremost a monthly review magazine, delivered today in both print and digital formats. It boasts an eminent and knowledgeable panel of experts, which reviews the full range of classical music recordings. Its reviews are completely independent. In addition to reviews, its interviews and features help readers to explore in greater depth the recordings that the magazine covers, as well as offer insight into the work of composers and performers. It is the magazine for the classical record collector, as well as for the enthusiast starting a voyage of discovery.

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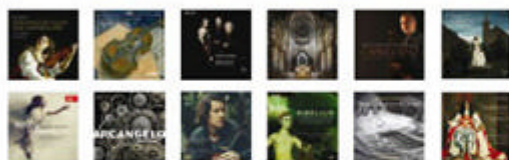
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EDITOR'S CHOICE

The 12 most highly recommended recordings of the month

FOR THE RECORD

The latest classical music news



Reviews

RECORDING OF THE MONTH

Alina Ibragimova tackles Ysaÿe's solo sonatas

ORCHESTRAL

Schubert's Ninth from Abbado; Norrington conducts Haydn's Paris Symphonies; a new Nielsen cycle from Storgårds and the BBCSO

CHAMBER

A Schubert Quintet from the Kuijkens; Ensemble Signal in Reich; The Borodin Quartet embark on a new Shostakovich cycle on Decca

INSTRUMENTAL

Menahem Pressler in Mozart; solo Glass from Tim Fain; Alexei Lubimov's 'Concord'; virtuoso harp arrangements from Xavier de Maistre

VOCAL

MacMillan's St Luke Passion; Pärt from the Bavarian Radio Chorus; a final Verdi Requiem from Maazel; Concerto Caledonia's Purcell

REISSUES

Remastered gems on Warner Classics and a major Charles Grove retrospective

OPERA

A major new Vinci release from Decca; two Lears on DVD; Domingo's Nabucco; Elizabeth Watts in Mozart; Brokeback Mountain on DVD

REPLAY

Important recordings of string players back in the catalogue, including the LaSalle and Amadeus Quartets, and Henryk Szeryng

BOOKS

Philip Glass's revealing new autobiography; a major new study of Bartók as man and musician

GRAMOPHONE COLLECTION

Bryce Morrison surveys the available recordings of Rachmaninov's Etudes-tableaux, Op 39

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As it celebrates its 250th birthday the Bergen Philharmonic Orchestra has both a proud history and bright future, says Harriet Smith

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Stone Records 5060192780567



PARADISO E INFERNO Matthew Gee trombone François Killian piano

World Premiere Recordings of Elliott Carter's 'Retracing V' and 'Gra'

"Sheer perfection...A warm and mellow honeyed tone" (Knaresborough Post)

Gee is one of the freshest and most imaginative performers on the current scene.

"Nobly intoned" (The Daily Telegraph)

MG Music GEE01



PICTURES AT AN EXHIBITION By Yaron Gottfried after Mussorgsky

Jazz Trio and Orchestra; Uno ensemble Beijing with Yaron Gottfried piano

A contemporary interpretation to the timeless masterpiece by Mussorgsky. Presented as a complete suite of 12 movements arranged and recomposed for Jazz trio and Orchestra. The timeless melodies and themes of Mussorgsky's original version are dressed in new colours and inspire new forms for the jazz trio to improvise.

GPR Records GPR50013



SCHWANENGESANG Matthew Rose & Malcolm Martineau

Rose's Winterreise was awarded Gramophone's Recording of the Month and BBC Radio 3's CD of the Week.

Now, Rose has produced a definitive recording of Schubert's final cycle.

A suitably-dramatic performance of enormous vitality from the young opera star whose performances at the Met and Covent Garden have delighted audiences and critics alike.

Stone Records 5060192780475



GLOUCESTER EXPERIENCE Jonathan Hope Organ of Gloucester Cathedral

The debut solo release from organist Jonathan Hope. Played on the stunning organ of Gloucester Cathedral. World Premiere recording of John Hosking's Hommage à Paris and works by John Sanders and Julius Reubke.

"... a powerful and inspired player"
Guildford URC Music Society

"Jonathan Hope's concert was truly memorable" Alton Organ Society

Willowhayne Records WHR035



THE MAGIC ISLAND HUSH COLLECTION VOLUME 13 Tasmanian Symphony Orchestra, Benjamin Northey

An album of original and calming orchestral music written by twelve of Australia's finest composers, for the Hush Music Foundation, to reduce stress and anxiety for those in hospitals and others in need. This is a collection of quite beautiful miniatures. The Hush Collection is now available for the first time outside of Australia.

Hush Collection HUSH013

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Sebastian Comberti (Artistic Director, Cello Classics)

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GRAMOPHONE *Editor's choice*

Martin Cullingford's pick of the finest recordings from this month's reviews



RECORDING OF THE MONTH



YSAÿE

Six Sonatas for Solo Violin, Op 27
Alina Ibragimova *vn*
Hyperion Ⓢ CDA67993
► **DUNCAN DRUCE'S REVIEW IS ON PAGE 22**

Fascinating, though fiendish, works, full of imagination and virtuosity written for Ysaÿe's friends – Alina Ibragimova, whose set of Bach's solo violin music so impressed in 2009, is just as triumphant here.



BIRTWISTLE

Angel Fighter, etc
London Sinfonietta / David Atherton
NMC Ⓢ NMCD211
Recent works from

Birtwistle, a composer whose music is as vivid and compelling as that of any today. Excellent performances here from David Atherton and the London Sinfonietta.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 29**



GRIEG Piano Concerto

Javier Perianes *pf*
BBC Symphony Orchestra / Sakari Oramo
Harmonia Mundi
Ⓢ HMC90 2205

Two facets of Grieg, the Concerto and the *Lyric Pieces* – and indeed of this young Spanish pianist's artistry – on a highly enjoyable disc.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 32**



BRIDGE. D'INDY. SCHULLHOFF

Sextets
Parnassus Akademie
Etcetera Ⓢ KTC1475
A debut CD from this group, and quite

a statement too, the technical challenges of these diverse sextets proving no obstacle to offering interpretations both rich and powerful.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 48**



GRIEG. HOUGH. MENDELSSOHN

Cello Sonatas
Steven Isserlis *vc*
Stephen Hough *pf*
Hyperion Ⓢ CDA68079

The rapport between Hough and Isserlis – already brilliantly captured on disc – offers us some rewarding Grieg and Mendelssohn, plus Hough's own Sonata.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 50**



MONTEVERDI

Madrigals, Vol 1: Cremona
Les Arts Florissants / Paul Agnew
Les Arts Florissants
Editions Ⓢ AF005

The initial volume in this series (confusingly called Volume 2) was Recording of the Month in January – the latest instalment is every bit as superb.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 70**



PÄRT Choral Works
Bavarian Radio Chorus;
Munich Radio Orchestra
/ Peter Dijkstra
BR-Klassik Ⓢ 900511
Another – though

completely contrasting – leading composer of today, showing the diverse riches our age offers. The sparse grandeur of Pärt's music is given fine performances.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 71**



'IF THE OWL CALLS AGAIN'

Joyce DiDonato *mez*
and friends
Warner Classics
Ⓢ 5419 63937-5

Eclectic and engaging throughout, this recital has a strong sense of personality – and personal choice – running throughout it.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 76**



GASPARINI Il Bajazet

Sols; Auser Musici / Carlo Ipata
Glossa Ⓢ ③ GCD923504
A premiere recording of a work with

interesting historical links – including its influence on Handel – but ultimately, a fine recording of an opera worth hearing in its own right.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 82**



'SCENE!'

Christiane Karg *sop*
Arcangelo / Jonathan Cohen
Berlin Classics
Ⓢ 03006468C

Superbly characterful singing from Christine Karg, supported throughout by the very impressive Jonathan Cohen and Arcangelo.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 92**



DVD/BLU-RAY

BEETHOVEN Piano Concerto No 3
Maria João Pires *pf* Orchestra of the 18th Century / Frans Brüggen

Fryderyk Chopin Institute Ⓢ DVD NIFCDVD005
One of two wonderful DVD releases this month from the same label, both played on the same 1849 Erard piano.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 24**



REISSUE/ARCHIVE BEETHOVEN

Symphony No 6
London Philharmonic Orchestra / Klaus Tennstedt
LPO Ⓢ LP00085

Tennstedt's bond with the LPO has left us this impressive *Pastoral*, from 1992.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 27**



Listen to many of the Editor's Choice recordings online at **qobuz.com**

FOR THE RECORD



Hausmann's portrait dates from 1748, two years before Bach died

The most important portrait of JS Bach returns home to Leipzig

The most important portrait of Johann Sebastian Bach has returned to Leipzig, the city in which its subject lived, worked, and composed some of the most remarkable and profound masterpieces in musical history.

The portrait – made from life – was painted by Leipzig artist Elias Gottlob Hausmann in 1748, depicting Bach aged around 60 and holding a score bearing the title ‘Canon triplex à 6 Voc: per J. S. Bach’.

It was most recently owned by American musicologist and philanthropist William H Scheide who died last November aged 101, having on his 100th birthday bequeathed the portrait to the Leipzig Bach Archive. It is valued at US\$2.5m.

The portrait was initially part of Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach's share of his father's inheritance, though from the early 19th century was owned by the Jewish Jenke family from Breslau (now Wrocław). During the Second World War, the painting's then owner Walter Jenke, who had fled to England from Nazi Germany, entrusted the portrait into the care of the father of Sir John Eliot Gardiner, now one of the world's leading interpreters of Bach's music and President of the Leipzig Bach Archive.

The conductor, who performed all of Bach's cantatas throughout the year 2000, performances subsequently issued on his own label Soli Deo

Gloria, recalls how he ‘passed in front of it several times a day all through my Dorset childhood, a time when I was first learning to sing the Bach motets by heart’.

Gardiner presented the painting to the public on June 12 at the opening of Leipzig's Bach Festival, and it will go on permanent display in the Leipzig Bach Museum. ‘It is both poignant and fitting to see the portrait leave its current home, where it has hung in the living room of the great Bach scholar and philanthropist, the late William Scheide, for the past 60-odd years, and to witness its return to Leipzig,’ said Gardiner.

Hausmann painted two portraits of Bach, though the other (dated two years earlier) has suffered a history of poor restoration and many details are blurred. This second portrait is also displayed in Leipzig, in the local history museum, the Stadtgeschichtliches Museum.



Daniel Hope to replace Sir Roger Norrington in Zurich

Violinist Daniel Hope will succeed Sir Roger Norrington as Music Director of the Zurich Chamber Orchestra (ZKO) from 2016. Under Norrington, who became the Music Director in 2011, the orchestra have made recordings for Sony Classical of Haydn's ‘Paris’ Symphonies, Mozart's Serenade No 5 and Divertimento No 10, and Stravinsky's *Dumbarton Oaks* and *L'Histoire du Soldat* Suite.

Hope served as the orchestra's Artist-in-Residence this season and made his first appearance with the orchestra in 2006. He will lead the orchestra from the violin.

BBC Music to extend their Ten Pieces to secondary schools

BBC Music is extending its Ten Pieces scheme from primary to secondary schools. Launched last year, the Ten Pieces scheme introduces school pupils to classical music through 10 specially chosen works that act as a ‘spring-board for creativity, as well as a range of online resources, UK-wide events and close collaboration with music and arts organisations.’ The new Ten Pieces selection includes Vaughan Williams's *The Lark Ascending*, Anna Clyne's *Night Ferry* and the second movement of Shostakovich's Tenth Symphony.

British Library secures £9.5m to ‘save the nation's sounds’

The Heritage Lottery Fund have earmarked £9,568,900 of funding for the sound archive at the British Library, which will enable them to digitise up to 500,000 recordings, guaranteeing them a secure future.

The library estimate that there are more than one million recordings which are at risk of being lost forever unless they are preserved within the next 15 years. These recordings range from ‘underwater recordings of killer whales made in the waters surrounding Shetland (held by the Centre for Wildlife Conservation, University of Cumbria), to a collection of sounds held in the Canterbury Cathedral archives spanning 50 years of services, choral and opera performances and other recordings, many of which are thought to be unique.’



English Heritage honours Lionel Tertis

Lionel Tertis honoured with English Heritage blue plaque

One of the great viola players of the last century, Lionel Tertis has been honoured with an English Heritage blue plaque at his former flat in Wimbledon.

Daniel Barenboim launches new piano at the Royal Festival Hall

A new piano has been unveiled at London's Royal Festival Hall, the Barenboim-Maene Concert Grand, conceived and created thanks to a collaboration between Daniel Barenboim and Belgian piano-maker Chris Maene. The Barenboim-Maene stands apart from most modern instruments in that the strings are stretched lengthways along the body of the piano rather than diagonally crossed as on a modern instrument.

Vote for Gramophone's Artist of the Year 2015

Voting is opening at gramophone.co.uk for the artist who has most captured our readers' imaginations with his or her work during past 12 months. The 10 artists are conductors Edward Gardner, Iván Fischer and Paavo Järvi, pianists Igor Levit and Ingrid Fliter, harpsichordist Mahan Esfahani, violinist Arabella Steinbacher and singers Christiane Karg, Carolyn Sampson and Christian Gerhaher. Voting closes on July 31.

Join Gramophone for an EFG Conversation at Foyles

Pianist and composer Stephen Hough joins us for an EFG Gramophone Conversation at Foyles on London's Charing Cross Road on July 7 at 7pm. Come along for some lively chat and a glass of wine. Full information and booking details at foyles.co.uk/events

David Pickard named as next Director of the BBC Proms

The BBC have announced that the next Director of the BBC Proms will be David Pickard. Pickard, who is currently General Director at Glyndebourne, will assume his role later this year and will report directly to Alan Davey, Controller of BBC Radio 3.

Davey welcomed Pickard and paid tribute to Edward Blakeman, who is overseeing this year's Proms: 'David comes from a background of musical excellence and exploration, and will bring a whole host of fresh ideas to help us ensure the greatest classical music festival in the world continues to provide the place for people to discover and rediscover the best classical music. I would like to thank Edward Blakeman for his work bringing us this year's season – one of huge musical depth which is proving to be a hit with audiences. He has done a superb job.'

Pickard became Glyndebourne's General Director in 2001. Under his leadership they have produced several highly-regarded opera productions on DVD and Blu-ray. The Glyndebourne production of Ravel's *L'heure espagnole* and *L'enfant et les sortilèges* won the Gramophone Opera Award last year and the production of Purcell's *The Fairy Queen*, conducted by William Christie, won the Gramophone DVD Performance Award in 2010. David McVicar's production of Handel's *Giulio Cesare* (also conducted by Christie) was our DVD Award winner in 2006.

Before joining Glyndebourne Pickard's positions included Chief Executive of the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment (1993-2001) and Managing Director of Kent Opera.



From Glyndebourne to the Proms: David Pickard

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PODCASTS

In the latest Gramophone Podcast conductor Riccardo Chailly (pictured, right) talks to Gramophone's Editor-in-Chief James Jolly (pictured, left) about Puccini and how he is settling in to his new role as Principal Conductor at La Scala, Milan.



RECORDINGS OF THE YEAR

Every year at the Gramophone Awards one of the Award-winning recordings is named Recording of the Year by our critics; it is our highest accolade. At the Gramophone website you can now read the original reviews of every Recording of the year since the first Gramophone Awards in 1977 and listen to many of the albums via Qobuz.

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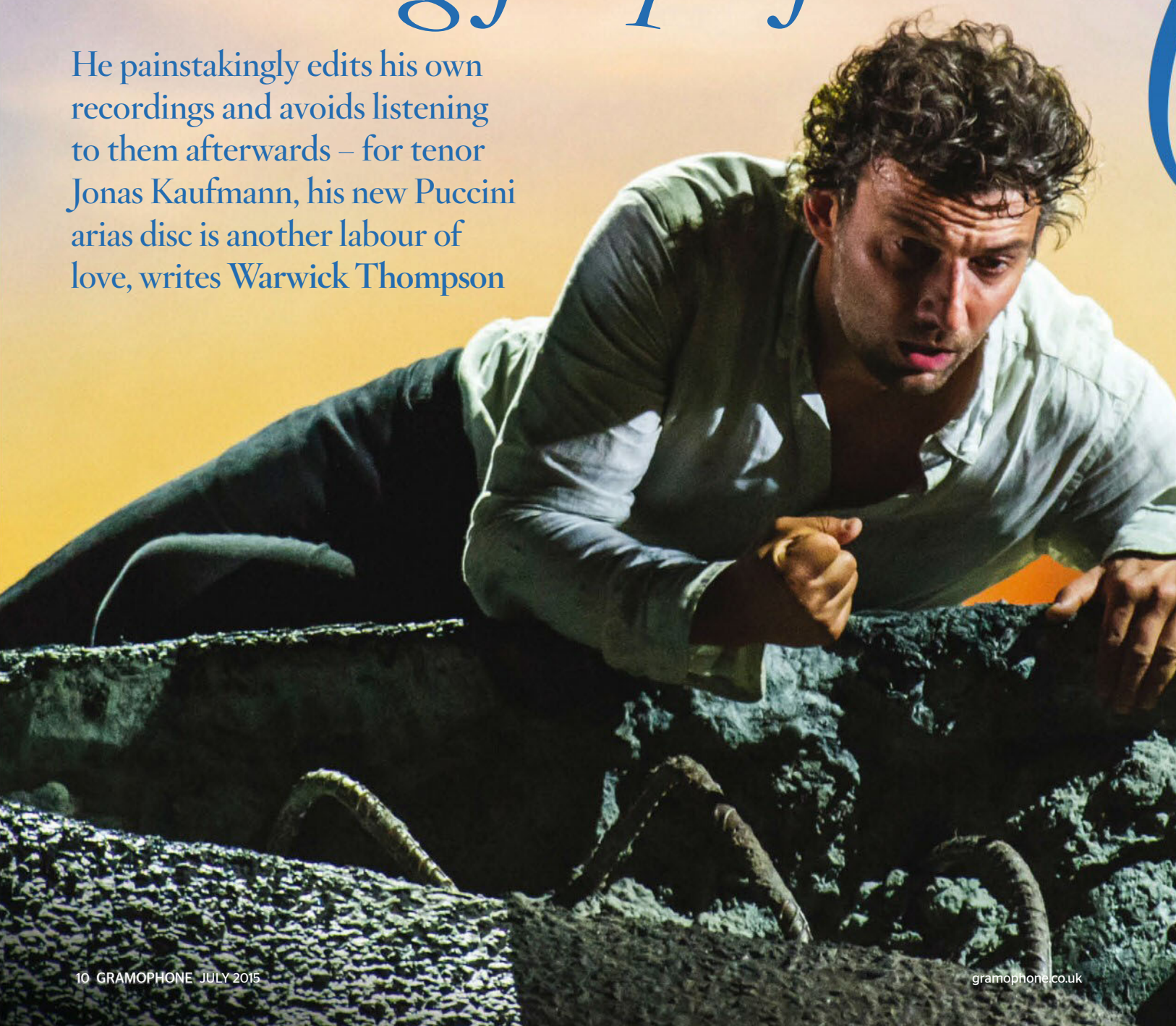
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Striving for perfection

He painstakingly edits his own recordings and avoids listening to them afterwards – for tenor Jonas Kaufmann, his new Puccini arias disc is another labour of love, writes Warwick Thompson



When Jonas Kaufmann speaks about his dazzling, all-encompassing disc of Puccini arias, which contains numbers from all of the composer's operas except (for fairly obvious reasons) *Suor Angelica*, his voice takes on an evangelical tone.

'Two years ago, when we had the Verdi and Wagner bicentenaries, anybody who was curious could really experience the whole oeuvres of those composers, from first to last,' he says. 'And I think that Puccini deserves the same thing. There are numbers in the two early operas *Edgar* and *Le villi* which have such overwhelmingly beautiful music and melodies...they're simply magical. They deserve to be heard.'

As I come to discover during the course of our enjoyable interview, this is a typical statement from the German tenor, combining as good a dose of head as of heart. He is a committed, thoughtful artist with plenty to say, who also happens to have the theatrical instincts of a fairground barker – and it is this wonderful combination of intellectual curiosity and scalp-prickling emotionalism (plus his dark, brooding voice with its clarion upper register) that has brought him to the point at which he is now routinely hailed as the greatest tenor of his generation.

Greatest? In judging any artistic endeavour, the term will always be a rather questionable piece of journalistic hackery, of course. How could one create a league table of, say, Juan Diego Flórez, Joseph Calleja and Brian Hymel without feeling that it would be like trying to sift apples and oranges? All are undoubtedly great artists. But even with that caveat, and even though Kaufmann's voice doesn't appeal to everyone – some criticise a lack of *mezza voce*, or an overly dark timbre – there's something about him that creates an extra frisson. The fact that his voice 'contains multitudes' – he has a graceful and flexible Italianate lyricism, a powerful baritone lower register, and the heft to scale the rarified slopes of the German Heldentenor repertoire – makes him an unclassifiable oddity, in the best possible sense. You can't put him in a box, for the simple reason that there's no box big enough.

Professionally, life couldn't be better. He has, despite the very occasional animadversion, pretty much bomb-proof approval ratings from audiences and critics, and he can afford to choose or refuse the projects that come his way. This September, he's been given the plum job of singing

Committed: Kaufmann as Des Grieux in Puccini's *Manon Lescaut* at the Royal Opera House in June 2014

PHOTOGRAPHY: BILL COOPER



Intense: recording Puccini arias was an obvious choice for Jonas Kaufmann, who has enjoyed major success on stage in many of Puccini's tenor roles

at the Last Night of the Proms, and, for anyone who frets about such things, will thus be the first German ever to perform 'Rule, Britannia!' at the event. He has a much-anticipated – to put it mildly – staged role debut coming up in May next year too, when he sings Walther in *Die Meistersinger* in his home city of Munich. There was another fillip recently when Sir Antonio Pappano, the Music Director of the Royal Opera, named the top three current singers of Italian repertoire: Diana Damrau, Anja Harteros and – naturally – Jonas Kaufmann. (That all three are Germans, Kaufmann puts down to his country's tradition of giving young singers contracts as part of an ensemble, and thus a chance to build their careers solidly and surely.) Pappano's admiration is reciprocated: Kaufmann adores the maestro, and asked him to conduct his new Puccini disc.

On a personal level, things aren't quite so rosy. There was a rocky patch last year when he announced on his website that he was separating from his mezzo-soprano wife Margarete Joswig, ending a relationship which had begun in the mid-1990s when the couple were both based at the opera house in Saarbrücken. The union has produced three children too. But we'll come back to that later.

When I meet Kaufmann, he looks relaxed, upbeat and full of vim. Our interview is at Ludwig Beck, a smart department store in central Munich, where the tenor is due to sign copies of a new edition of his biography *Meinen die wirklich mich?*

'There are arias in Puccini's two early operas which are so overwhelmingly beautiful that they deserve to be heard'

('Do they really mean me?') written by his friend and manager Thomas Voigt. By the time I arrive, the queue of fans is already pushing at the seams of the CD department.

A store employee waves me through the jostling crowd of opera lovers into a comfortable little antechamber where the singer is waiting. He's friendly, charming, and laid-back, and it's soon clear that he seems happy to be in his own skin.

He looks trim in a casual shirt and jeans, and though there's a small sprinkling of salt and pepper in his famously curly locks, his 'silver fox' years are way ahead of him yet (he's 46 on July 10).

We talk first about his new disc. For a singer who is so careful and thoughtful about the progression of his career and about the roles he chooses (often waiting years before reprising a new role after a first outing, just in case it doesn't suit him), I wonder if an album of Puccini arias is a bit, well, *vin ordinaire*? A bit predictable, perhaps? He concedes some ground. 'It's obvious that at some point when you start having a major success with the roles of a certain composer, that you should concentrate on that. And it's certainly much easier to record an album when you've sung the whole role and not just studied the aria. It really helps you get into the mood much better. But there's something more. Puccini was the most modern of the really popular composers. He experienced so many of the inventions which have taken place in the modern era, and I think this is why the access to that music is easier for us – maybe more so than for

other composers who are equally talented; we're further away from their mentality, their time frame. So the idea was to show an overview of Puccini's work, to start with the very first opera and finish at the very end, to understand how far he had come in his career.'

Of Puccini's principal tenor roles, Kaufmann has sung on stage Rodolfo, Cavaradossi, Des Grieux, Dick Johnson, and Ruggero (*La rondine*). Still to come are Calaf ('it's certainly on the list') and Pinkerton. A question mark hovers over the latter, however, although he has recorded the part with Angela Gheorghiu as Butterfly. 'It's just not a very attractive role. I'm not speaking about the vocal writing – but you have to understand that Pinkerton is just either very stupid or very arrogant, and you have to deal with it. It's not that I mind playing the evil guy though: it's not so often that the tenor gets to be the bad guy in opera.'

And the young lover Rodolfo? Is he scheduled to make a reappearance? 'The role is certainly not over, but...it's funny, I was just thinking about another lighter role, Nemorino [in *L'elisir d'amore*] the other day too. And I wondered why I'm not doing it anymore. It's still possible for me, and it's a wonderful part. But I have the ability to do so many things, and there's so much else to choose from – and everyone is always asking me about Otello, Tannhäuser, Siegfried.'

The tenor in *Gianni Schicchi* is also a boyish (and rather minor) love interest – would it tempt him on stage? 'No, I assume it's not going to happen. In fact, when we first discussed the disc, I really wasn't sure whether to include this aria, as it's really for a much lighter tenor. But then Thomas [Voigt] sent me a link to a clip of Giuseppe di Stefano [a singer with considerable reserves of *spinto* power] singing it in 1949 – so I had to do it too. And I learned that it can be done with lots of voice.'

Did anything unexpected crop up during the recording process, I wonder? 'Yes, I found it fascinating that Puccini's early arias are much longer than the later ones. They get shorter and shorter the whole time, almost becoming like pop songs. Maybe it's because Puccini was a very clever businessman, and he knew that a shellac disc could only contain a certain number of minutes. Perhaps he was trying to write something perfect for that medium...who knows?'

The more we talk, the more I sense that *it's time Kaufmann did a Puccini disc 'kerching! kerching!'* was really the least important factor in the journey of his latest album. 'The thing is, I have to decide my calendar five years in advance. First there are the new opera productions; then the revivals; then the concert tours; then the smaller events, like single concerts or a recital. So I keep a gap for recording, not knowing what the content might be, who the conductor will be, or even which orchestra. But I know I will have these 10 days or so in my diary. And then, depending on who is available, we decide on the programme. In this case, having Pappano and the Santa Cecilia orchestra, I knew we had to do something Italian. Puccini was the obvious choice. And to record it in Rome [at the Parco Musical] was a stroke of luck.'

Kaufmann, an enthusiastic and articulate speaker, reaches a new height of fervour when talking about his friend and colleague Pappano. 'It's a privilege and pleasure to work with him, but also enormous fun. For me this is really making music. He sticks to you like glue, and feels every little detail that you're about to do: he doesn't react a couple of seconds after you've decided to do something. He knows exactly and instinctively where I want to go. It's funny, when I asked him the first time, to conduct my "Verismo" album, he didn't want to: he said,

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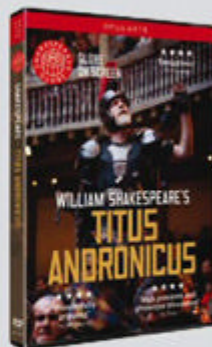


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Ideal collaboration: Kaufmann and Pappano admire each other hugely; 'He knows exactly and instinctively where I want to go,' Kaufmann says of the conductor

"Actually I won't do that, I don't do solo albums...but oh, what the heck! It's *verismo*, it's my thing. We have to do it." So we did. And here we are again, this time with Puccini.'

Kaufmann tells me that he avoids listening to recordings when preparing a role, or even when making a recording himself, preferring to 'keep open-minded as long as possible.' Does he like the process of a recording? 'Honestly, no.

I think an artist changes constantly: and if you want to keep your quality, it means not holding on to it, but constantly refining it. Always criticising yourself, asking the big

questions. And for each performance, I try to be spontaneous, to develop it in the moment. And therefore it will be different each time.' So what's the compromise? How does he square the recording circle? 'I listen to the tracks a million times during the editing process, and partly edit them myself. Because I think only you as an artist can say what you're pleased with the most: it's not rationally measurable. Sometimes it disturbs me enormously if I'm not rhythmically correct, or a little bit sharp, or a little bit flat – and sometimes I love it! Because it's on purpose, it's part of my interpretation – and who else can decide that? So the editing becomes a hell of a lot of work. But after that, I never listen to it again.' Never? 'Well, if it came on the radio, I wouldn't turn it off. But I'd never think to pick up one of my CDs and listen to it. What would I find? Would I be pleased? What would I do?'

'I listen to the tracks a million times during the editing process. But after that, I never listen to the recording again'

It's the first time in our conversation that Kaufmann seems uncertain of himself. But, tellingly, his uncertainty doesn't seem to trouble him unnecessarily, or disturb his underlying air of self-confidence. This auto-stability can be traced partly to his supportive family background. He is the son of parents who had fled East Germany before the building of the Berlin Wall, and who then settled in Munich. His father worked for an

insurance firm, and his mother was a nursery school teacher. Both were passionate about music, and the family would regularly sit down to listen to records of Mahler, Shostakovich, Bruckner

and Rachmaninov. The young Jonas saw his first opera, *Madama Butterfly*, at seven, and fell in love with the art form. He also sang in choirs all through his school years, and loved the joy of performance. But fearing the financial insecurity of a singer's life, when the time came to choose a subject for university he plumped for maths. He lasted just two terms, before the irresistible lure of lyric performance made him switch to vocal studies. To support himself during this time, he worked as a chauffeur for BMW, driving one of its luxurious 7 Series sedans. (The one drawback of the job, he notes, was that he had to keep his hair short.)

After university he spent two years on contract at the State Theatre in Saarbrücken, before his incipient, but obvious, talents began to be noticed elsewhere too. But then he began to notice vocal problems. His voice tired easily, and was constantly

hoarse, and he feared for its reliability in performance. Fortunately he met Michael Rhodes, an American baritone living in Germany, who persuaded him to stop trying to sound like the bright, silvery Germanic tenor that he thought he should be, and to let out the much more idiosyncratic – but utterly natural – dark, rich, baritone tenor that he was. The tiredness and hoarseness vanished, and the power increased. Kaufmann has bravely written and spoken about this process quite frequently. I say ‘bravely’ because, in the world of opera, singers often fear that any taint of vocal unreliability will stop them being cast *tutto presto*. For a performer to be open about such an area of vulnerability is certainly to be applauded.


After this vocal rebirth, hugely successful debuts began to follow at Munich, the Met, Covent Garden, Vienna, Salzburg and other major houses. And the rest, as they say, is history.

There have been professional bumps along the way, naturally. An illness caused some cancellations in August last year. And there have been controversial productions – including Hans Neuenfels’s ‘spaceship’ *Manon Lescaut* in Munich, which Anna Netrebko stormed out of just weeks before opening night last November (Kristine Opolais partnered Kaufmann as a last-minute replacement instead). How does he deal with a situation where he might himself disagree with a director’s concept? ‘I try to keep calm, discuss it with the director and my colleagues and try to find a solution. I don’t suffer unprofessionalism or ignorance gladly, but I’m not the type who creates big trouble and walks out. If you walk out, you can’t change anything, you can’t contribute something to make things better. But you can, if you stay.’

His marriage, unfortunately, suffered a different fate, and the option of staying together was not possible. Both parties have agreed not to talk about details, but I ask him in general terms about the pressures a peripatetic career can have on one’s family. ‘What can I say?’ he replies. ‘It’s not easy being on tour most of the time and having a family life. What can you do in those moments where you feel very lonely and miss your family badly? Talking to them and seeing them via Skype may help sometimes, but often it makes things worse, because you see on screen what you could have had if you’d stayed at home. On the other hand, you appreciate the enormous value of those days you *can* spend with your family.’

On a recent illuminating edition of *Desert Island Discs*, Kaufmann revealed that he has a handyman streak, and always travels with a screwdriver. I ask him, somewhat cheekily, to tell me the most recent thing he’s fixed, and am touched by the reply. ‘It was a shelf in the room of one of my kids,’ he says.

One of the next engagements for which he will be separated from his offspring is the Last Night of Proms, at which he’ll be singing some of the arias on his disc. But Kaufmann – who has appeared only once before at the Proms, in a 2004 performance of Beethoven’s Symphony No 9 – is nevertheless looking forward to it tremendously. ‘It’s amazing. It really rocks,’ he says, referring to the spectacle of the Last Night. ‘I remember when I first saw it on television on holiday in Norway – I was about 13 or 14. And I thought, “What *is* that?” It was like a pop concert, with so many people clamouring and cheering – but was it a comedy? I couldn’t get it. I was totally blown away. This sort of event is so important for us at a time when everybody is struggling, when we’re always reading that classical music is about to die. It’s great to support something like that.’

It certainly helps, of course, if such an event can bag a Jonas Kaufmann to aid the clamour and cheering. 

► Kaufmann sings at the Last Night of the Proms on Sept 12; his Puccini arias disc on Sony Classical is released on Sept 14, and will be reviewed in the Awards issue

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STILL GOING STRONG:

Bergen Philharmonic Orchestra *at 250*

With its Music Director Andrew Litton, the Bergen Philharmonic Orchestra has been busy increasing its international profile. With a Proms concert, anniversary commissions and a new conductor all on the horizon, the future's looking bright for this little 'Harmonien', writes Harriet Smith



PHOTOGRAPHY: STEVE J. SHERMAN

Googling 'Bergen Philharmonic' doesn't lead you quite where you'd expect, landing on the 'other' Bergen Philharmonic in New Jersey. That outfit doesn't have quite the kudos or the longevity of the Norwegian orchestra, though, which this year celebrates its 250th anniversary.

That an ensemble not exactly at the heart of Europe and not even in a capital city should have garnered the accolade of one of the world's oldest orchestras might initially seem curious. Established in 1765 as a musical society, the orchestra became officially known as 'Musiksekskabet Harmonien', although the locals simply call it 'Harmonien'. Strikingly, it was set up not by a court or the church but by the bourgeoisie – the businessmen of Bergen. They had grown wealthy, in part due to the powerful alliance of the Hanseatic League, helping Bergen to become the country's largest city at the time (with a population of around 14,000) and highly international in outlook. Its businessmen wanted to show they were men of culture too, hence the enthusiasm for an orchestra. Embracing the new has always been a vital element – it performed Beethoven's Second Symphony in 1804, the year the piece was published. And just before Christmas last year it established a new 'digital concert hall', which allows concerts to be streamed for free. As the orchestra's Communications Director Henning Målsnes, explains: 'The feedback has been really good so far.

We are learning as we go but so far we've had about 8000 views. We streamed a concert with Andrew [Litton] from January and have gone on from there: Edward Gardner's *Glagolitic Mass*, Mahler songs with Alice Coote. We're also hoping to stream Mahler's Fourth and Unsuk Chin's *Scenes from Alice in Wonderland* with Juanjo Mena.'

The orchestra's anniversary has proved a useful hook for all sorts of activities – contemporary music foremost among them. As Henning comments: 'We have a commissioning programme which we've called Opus 250, which features more than 25 works by Norwegian and international composers. And we're also commissioning a special project for the anniversary itself in which three Bergen-born composers from different generations – Ketil Hvoslef, Knut Vaage and Ørjan Matre – will respond to a poem we've commissioned on the different meanings of the word "Harmonien". It will be exciting to see what they do with it.'

The birthday itself falls on October 8, celebrated by a gala concert with music directors old and new – Andrew Litton and Edward Gardner – plus, of course, pianist Leif Ove Andsnes. He's the city's favourite musical son, having gone to study at the Bergen Music Conservatory aged just 16. Another innovation is a new youth orchestra for 16- to 25-year-olds, which will make its official debut in the same month with Holst's *The Planets*, conducted by Kristjan Järvi.

The orchestra's increasing profile internationally perhaps reflects the fact that in the past 30 years it has had successively Italian, Russian, Australian and then American music directors (Aldo Ceccato, Dmitri Kitajenko, Simone Young and Andrew Litton). Its repertoire has changed palpably under the latest incumbent, who took over as Music Director in 2003, with lots of juicy Russian repertoire – Shostakovich, Stravinsky and Prokofiev – but also Mahler and Richard Strauss. And the direction will switch again when Edward Gardner takes over next season, with more Brahms, Schumann and Janáček in the pipeline.

Litton is refreshingly candid about the way his relationship with Bergen began. 'I first arrived to conduct the orchestra in October 1998, thinking to myself, "Has my career tanked so much that I'm coming here to conduct this orchestra I've never heard of?" It didn't help that it was pitch black and pouring with rain. The next morning I threw open the curtains, the sun was shining, there was snow on the mountains. And I went over to the hall and gave them the preparatory beats for Shostakovich's Fifth, already rolling my eyes inwardly, and the lower strings came in "Bah Dum"! And I was stunned. As I've said before, it was love at first beat. Great chemistry – and that doesn't happen every week.'

In 2000 the orchestra started asking him to become its next Music Director. 'They asked three times, and the third time was over dinner – the quickest way to my heart!' Litton is known for an uncanny ability to raise the profile of whichever orchestra he happens to be heading, be it Bournemouth, Dallas or Bergen (though his biggest challenge is surely the next one, the Colorado Symphony). That raised international profile is partly a result of a much-increased tour schedule, including significant tours in 2007 (conveniently hooked to the centenary of Grieg's death) to Vienna, debuts at the BBC Proms and the Amsterdam Concertgebouw, and a major tour of the USA. Later this summer they return to the Proms with a typically eclectic programme: Stravinsky's *The Rite of Spring* and Mendelssohn's Violin Concerto combining with new works by Alissa Firsova and Ørjan Matre. All this, as Litton points out, has helped the orchestra's perception at home too. 'When people

in Bergen suddenly started reading great reviews we were getting of concerts in Oslo or the United States, it made them realise it was no longer just their little "Harmonien". To have an orchestra of this standard in a city of this size is extremely unusual but again to avoid the provincial feel you have to get out – you have to play away games. And one of the most exciting things about this ensemble is its international nature: the players are about 50 per cent non-Norwegian, from countries such as Latvia, Switzerland and New Zealand, as well as the UK and Germany.'

On the evening I heard them the Litton effect was clearly evident, with a programme centred around Korngold's luscious *Sinfonietta*. 'I've wanted to programme the Korngold for 12 years because the Bergen's string section has such a gorgeous sound. And we came up with this Vienna theme, so you've got the darkness of the Mahler songs contrasting with the beauty and sentimentality of the

Lehár' – all sung with typical finesse by baritone Bo Skovhus.

One of the other aspects that Litton has developed with the orchestra is recording. 'BIS was already here recording a Grieg cycle but that could have been it. I came in and they got interested in Prokofiev and Mendelssohn. And we then learnt the discipline of recording for BIS, who are incredibly "persnickety" about the quality, which is fantastic. I'm thrilled with the Prokofiev Fifth, our latest release. The orchestra are on great form: they have a way of playing Russian music which is similar to how I was taught by Rostropovich, which is basically that you take no prisoners. If you're not in a puddle at the end, you haven't given enough.'

The appointment of Edward Gardner is, by common consent, a smart move. Litton talks of Gardner's 'youthful energy', continuing: 'I'm thrilled he wanted the job because it certainly takes him out of the UK spotlight. It's a natural fit and he also brings with him recording experience with Chandos, which is terrific for the orchestra.'


As for what makes the Bergen Philharmonic stand out today, Litton puts it down to a unique sound quality: 'The warmth of the strings, who can really sustain a sound through the bow – that's special. And the quirky woodwind, so full of character. And then my principal trumpet and trombone are both American and we're kind of known for brass players.



'Taking no prisoners': Andrew Litton has injected new life into the Bergen Philharmonic

'With the Bergen players, it was love at first beat. Great chemistry – and that doesn't happen every week' – Andrew Litton

from copyright to the orchestra, which was very good news when you think how popular the *Lyric Pieces* were, played in homes everywhere.' The Grieg Archive is vast, encompassing some 5000 letters, and 150 manuscripts as well as his diaries, account books, private collection of printed scores ('enormously

interesting because so many people sent their own music to him, wanting his opinion') and articles, clippings and concert programmes from his time as a student in Leipzig. And his books too. From even the most cursory exploration you build up a picture of a man for whom detail was all, from the fastidiously executed manuscripts to his account books which note every train fare, every order for nails relating to his other great love, the house being built for him and Nina at Trolldhaugen. To visit that house today is to get still more of a sense of the man. Not only the house itself – which combines a fairy-tale exterior with a simple wooden and airy interior that seems strikingly modern – but even more so his composing hut, little more than a shed with a vast picture-window overlooking the fjord below. An apt reminder that, while it's extraordinary to be able to explore so much online via scanned manuscripts and the Bergen Philharmonic's digital concert hall, nothing beats the real thing. 

► Hear Litton and the Bergen Philharmonic Orchestra in Prom 56 (August 27), performing Mendelssohn's Violin Concerto with Alina Ibragimova (see page 20)

So it is definitely a hybrid sound but the interesting thing is that the bulk of the Norwegians are in the string section so the warmth obviously comes from the drinking water!

Perhaps it's the drinking water that accounts for Bergen's illustrious musical history. Even today, the city is dominated by two figures: the violinist Ole Bull, who was reckoned by Schumann to be as prodigious a player as Paganini, and of course Edvard Grieg. Both are conspicuous within the city but, even more so, in Bergen's remarkable public library. Just as the orchestra is far more than a regional ensemble, that is equally true of the library, which functions more like a national than a public institution and houses the collections of both Bull and Grieg. As Siren Steen, longtime Head of the Grieg Archives, comments: 'Grieg bequeathed his collection to the library because he wanted local people to get to know good music. And of course he bequeathed his earnings

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MAKING MUSIC

– *what's it all about?*

In the run-up to her Proms concerts, Alina Ibragimova talks to Hannah Nepil about freedom, vibrato, period performance and recording Ysaÿe and Bach

Alina Ibragimova looks at me intently. I have just quizzed her on the demands of the six solo violin sonatas by the Belgian composer and violinist Eugène Ysaÿe – a topic on which she is something of an expert. The Russian-born violinist began learning these works as a schoolgirl, has played them in various concerts, and has just recorded them for Hyperion. She's well aware of their ferocious technical demands: the weird and wild harmonic language

built up of whole-tone scales, dissonances and quarter-tones; the virtuoso bow and left-hand techniques liberally scattered throughout. But the brevity of her reply takes me aback. 'There are many directions you can take this music. It's very improvisatory. You have to feel very free with it.' Then she fixes those catlike green eyes on me again with an air of 'over to you'.

Evidently, this violinist likes her playing to do most of the talking, which it does very eloquently. At 29, Ibragimova



demonstrates the kind of musical maturity that many violinists strive for several decades to achieve. She has a gift for making the most hard-worked warhorses sound fresh and at the same time natural, as though she were dreaming them up on the spot. It comes as no surprise that she doesn't listen to other performances of the pieces she is preparing. 'Even if you hear an interpretation and you don't like it, somehow the seed still plants itself in your mind. So I prefer to stay as blank as I can.'

It's an approach that has worked well in her Ysaÿe recording, which showcases that very breadth of imagination for which Ibragimova is known, not least because these 1924 sonatas are so highly varied. Each is dedicated to one of Ysaÿe's violinist contemporaries: the first in G minor to Joseph Szigeti, the fourth in E minor to Fritz Kreisler, for instance. 'And you can really hear the individual personalities and playing styles of those violinists,' says Ibragimova, 'for example, the warmth that Kreisler had.' As a package, they serve as a repository for all the knowledge of violin technique that Ysaÿe acquired in his playing career, representing the evolution of musical expression in his time.

But they also pay homage to Bach's sonatas and partitas for solo violin. The first in the series is modelled on the first in Bach's set; and the second directly quotes the beginning of the Prelude from Bach's Partita No 3 in E, an affectionate in-joke for dedicatee Jacques Thibaud, who used the Prelude for daily practice. As for the rest, like Bach's music they are full of

labyrinthine contrapuntal passages. 'Ysaÿe was a great violinist and he knew how to write for the violin in the same way that Bach did, combining a few voices and making a complete piece with just one instrument,' Ibragimova explains. Does this music, then, require a similar approach to the sonatas of Bach? Not exactly. 'There are so many sound effects in Ysaÿe that you can afford to take a completely different route in each performance. In Bach, however, every note matters and the music goes very deep.' She continues: 'It's harder to concentrate all the way through Bach, and to capture the balance between the details and the whole structure.'

Ibragimova is well qualified to comment: her radical recording of Bach's sonatas and partitas for Hyperion was acclaimed as a classic when it was released in 2009. Many praised her ability to incorporate her knowledge of 18th-century string playing while reimagining every chord afresh. For me, what set it apart from many other interpretations was its sense of emotional honesty and force. The effect was one of mesmerising rawness that never compromised the dignity of Bach's music.

Ibragimova is set to play the sonatas and partitas again in two of her four BBC Proms performances. She admits that the pressure is on: 'The thing about playing those solo violin pieces', she says, 'is that there is nowhere to hide. In a way,

you are naked on stage.' But she is not apprehensive at all. 'I don't get nervous,' she says, as though the very possibility is alien to her. 'If I had to speak onstage then I would be super nervous; any time I have to announce anything onstage I hate it. But playing is different.'

That's how she's always felt, ever since taking up the violin at the age of four. Perhaps that's not surprising. Her early childhood, in Moscow, was steeped in music: her father was a double bassist, her mother a violinist. And by the age of six Ibragimova's CV already listed a performance with the Bolshoi Theatre Orchestra.


At the age of 10 she moved to England, after her father took up a position in the London Symphony Orchestra. Her Russian roots continued to manifest themselves, particularly in her highly disciplined approach to practice. Still, had she remained in Russia, she says, she probably would have become a very different sort of violinist, namely because 'there is more information in the UK; more possible directions to be aware of. You are freer to choose what you like as a musician and what you want to do.'

For Ibragimova, that was historically informed performance, a path she began to explore at the Yehudi Menuhin School by

'This is music that was designed to shock – but it's made to sound too perfect. Music is not about pleasing everyone'

performing Bach without vibrato. The results, she says, were initially hit and miss, mostly because she had not yet developed the bow arm technique to compensate in expressivity for the lack of vibrato. But following studies at the Royal College of Music and the Guildhall School of Music and Drama she developed a clear, yet instinctive approach: 'For me it's no longer a conscious decision whether to use vibrato or not – it's more second nature. But there are definite places where vibrato doesn't make sense to me: its purpose is to draw things out of the music, and sometimes you don't want to do that.'

She believes that every composer – whether Bach or Ysaÿe – is subject to historical style, which she regularly implements in her period-instrument ensemble, the Chiaroscuro Quartet. Performing on gut strings, the 10-year-old group regularly take on such composers as Schumann, Mendelssohn and Beethoven, whose chamber works are almost invariably played on modern instruments. As the violinist admits, to those used to hearing metal strings, the Chiaroscuro's sound comes as something of a shock. 'It's earthy. It's not always beautiful.' And that, she insists, is the point. 'We recently recorded Beethoven's Op 95, a crazy piece with a first movement that's by no means beautiful. This is music that was designed to shock. But often it's made to sound too perfect.'

Indeed, what drives Ibragimova is the urge to convey the core message of a work, without surrendering to the pressure to prettify it or play it safe. 'I don't want to please everyone. That's not really what music is about.' So what *is* it about? Ibragimova answers: 'It's about enjoying something together, rather than deciding objectively what's worth 10 out of 10 and what's worth 9.2 out of 10. I'm sure some people are going to love what I do and some people are going to hate it, and that's fine,' she says. 'That's how it should be.' 

► For Gramophone's review of Ibragimova's CD of Ysaÿe solo violin sonatas see page 22. Ibragimova is featured in Proms 19, 21 and 56, and Saturday Matinee 3

GRAMOPHONE

RECORDING OF THE MONTH

Duncan Druce enjoys a new disc of Eugène Ysaÿe's Solo Sonatas, works fully exploiting the instrument's techniques and each dedicated to one of his violinist colleagues and friends



Ysaÿe

Six Sonatas for Solo Violin, Op 27

Alina Ibragimova *violin*

Hyperion © CDA67993 (68' • DDD)

Alina Ibragimova has made many fine recordings in recent years, but this solo Ysaÿe disc must count as one of her most memorable achievements. She gives full value to the sonatas' varied expressive character, their virtuosity, and the imaginative and poetic way Ysaÿe wrote for his instrument. And she makes the music sound quite beautiful: we never feel the medium of unaccompanied violin is at all limiting; the sonatas speak to us unimpeded, without any sense of strain.

Ysaÿe composed the set in 1924, when his illustrious performing career was almost over. He dedicated each of the six to a different colleague among the fraternity of violinists, and we can follow their characteristics through the set – the First Sonata for Joseph Szigeti substantial and serious, and reflecting his prowess as a Bach interpreter; the Third Sonata commemorating the free, romantic style of Enescu, the Sixth Manuel Quiroga's Spanish heritage, and so on. Ysaÿe sought in all six works to merge the Baroque tradition of solo violin-writing exemplified by Bach with the virtuoso styles of Paganini and Ernst, plus newer ways of writing of his own, leaning towards Impressionism.

At the start of the First Sonata (track 1) we notice Ibragimova's deliberate, serious approach,



characterised by strong dynamic contrasts and a powerful sense of line. The playing here communicates deep emotional involvement; and she's equally successful in putting over the graceful, *amabile* character of the contrasting third movement (tr 3).

The Second Sonata, dedicated to Ysaÿe's close friend Jacques Thibaud, might appear to contradict what we know of the latter's easy-going nature and graceful playing, suggesting a darker side. The initial skittish

quotation from Bach's Third Partita for Solo Violin is set against obsessive repetitions of the 'Dies irae' chant, which continue throughout the sonata. Ibragimova is equally at home in the gentle, muted, melancholic second movement (tr 6) and the finale, 'Les Furies', which she attacks with extraordinary gusto (tr 8). Especially memorable here is the reintroduction of 'Dies irae' as a barely audible *sul ponticello* whisper (1'10"), contrasting with fiercely dissonant arpeggios.

With the single-movement Third Sonata, she draws a convincing distinction between the opening in recitative style, done very freely and as though improvised, and the main theme, held at a firm tempo. As the sonata nears its final climax (tr 9, 7'01"), there's a sense of throwing caution to the wind, accomplished without any loss of tonal quality.

The Fourth Sonata is dedicated to Fritz Kreisler, with more Bachian echoes, as well as a nod to Kreisler's interest in reviving – or composing in imitation of – more obscure 18th-century composers,



Eugène Ysaÿe – revered as performer and teacher, long underrated as composer

with movements entitled Allemande and Sarabande. The first of these has an extremely slow tempo marking, which Ibragimova treats with freedom, allowing the movement's different facets to come together to make a satisfying narrative. And in the *moto perpetuo* finale she makes full use of the varied bow strokes indicated (a tribute to Kreisler?), building up once more a cumulative sense of excitement towards the conclusion.

The Fifth Sonata is dedicated to Ysaÿe's longtime friend and colleague Mathieu Crickboom. Its opening movement, 'L'aurore', is an Impressionistic depiction of dawn breaking, which allows Ibragimova to display a fantastic array of the quietest tone colours. She brings infectious rhythmic vitality to the 'Danse rustique' that follows.

As well as its Spanish idiom, the Sixth Sonata most clearly shows Ysaÿe as the

'Alina Ibragimova makes the music sound quite beautiful; we never feel the medium of unaccompanied violin is at all limiting, the sonatas speaking to us unimpeded, without any sense of strain'

heir to the great 19th-century virtuoso tradition – he had, after all, been a pupil of Wieniawski and Vieuxtemps. If we think of Ibragimova as a thoughtful, even scholarly player, here she proves herself adept at all the frequent showy tricks. Ysaÿe had a deeper purpose, of course: this piece's sparkling surface is designed to portray an ardent character, full of extravagant gestures. And not only do the difficulties hold no terrors for Ibragimova, she also, as throughout the disc, gives a strong impression of having fun playing the music.

It seems very sad that none of the dedicatees of the Ysaÿe Sonatas made recordings of them. It may be that though Ysaÿe the great performer and teacher was revered, his compositions were not considered to be significant – it's only in recent years that a handful of remarkable late chamber works have been unearthed and played. Whatever the reason, the Op 27 sonatas were virtually ignored until the LP era, and then it was individual works, most commonly No 3, that appeared on disc – with fine accounts by Oistrakh, Grumiaux, Rabin and Odnoposoff. Then came the first



Alina Ibragimova's new Hyperion disc joins the ranks of great recordings of Ysaÿe's solo sonatas

recordings of the whole set, by Ruggiero Ricci and Oscar Shumsky (whose 1982 performance is particularly commanding).

Since then, dozens of versions have appeared, giving the works the status of classics. Among them, I've always admired Leonidas Kavakos's exceptionally clear, poised account from 1999. Then there's Thomas Zehetmair, in 2004, playing with magnificent energy and commitment, and a feeling for the music and sense of fantasy that are different from Ibragimova's but in no way inferior. However, she takes her place now as one of the most distinguished exponents of these fascinating works. **G**

Selected comparisons:

Shumsky (8/83⁸) (NIMB) NI5039

Zehetmair (1/05) (ECM) 472 687-2

Kavakos (BIS) BIS-CD1046

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Editor's Choice

Martin Cullingford's pick of the finest recordings reviewed in this issue

Orchestral



David Thresher enjoys Arcangelo's new disc of Haydn and Mozart:

'You sense the fun they have with the music while never playing fast and loose with the basic pulse.' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 32**



Edward Seckerson welcomes a new Nielsen cycle from John Storgårds:

'I like the way Storgårds illuminates the startling new sound world of the last two symphonies' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 37**

Arnold • Field

Arnold Fantasy on a Theme of John Field, Op 116^a. Philharmonic Concerto, Op 120^b. Symphony No 7, Op 113^b Field Nocturne No 7, 'Rêverie'^c

^a**Peter Donohoe** *pf*

^{ab}**Royal Scottish National Orchestra / Martin Yates**

Dutton Epoch © CDLX7318 (73' • DDD/DSD)



This useful anthology brings together three of Malcolm Arnold's most powerfully

distinctive and deeply personal works.

All date from the first half of the 1970s – a period of great turmoil for the then Dublin-based composer.

Fearlessly uncompromising in expression, the Seventh Symphony is cast in three movements, each carrying a dedication to one of Arnold's children, its numbingly bleak centrepiece ostensibly portraying the world of his autistic son, Edward. (It's also hard not to hear in this harrowing music something of the desperation and anguish of the hapless parent.) Martin Yates tears into the opening *Allegro energico* with a vengeance and his reading overall shaves around six minutes off those by Vernon Handley (Conifer, 3/91 – nla) and Andrew Penny (Naxos, 9/01). Unfortunately, the combination of a driven approach and the RSNO Centre's reverberant, slightly hollow acoustic means that *tuttis* take on an unhelpfully hectic, rowdy quality that quickly tires the ear. Nor do I quite register the relentless logic, sinewy authority and inexorable concentration that help to make Handley's enviably unforced, pioneering account in particular such a riveting experience.

It's preceded here by the 22-minute *Fantasy on a Theme of John Field* for piano and orchestra – another astonishing creation, enjoyably bonkers in its disparate stylistic borrowings and wild mood-swings, yet also wholly characteristic in its urgently communicative manner. Dedicatee John Lill made a marvellously eloquent recording of it with Handley and the RPO (Conifer,

2/94 – nla), but Peter Donohoe, too, plays with coruscating aplomb, his partnership with Yates and the RSNO evincing a wealth of character, valiant emotional scope and sense of danger that compel from start to finish. (Donohoe also gives us a shapely performance of Field's original solo Nocturne No 7 in C major – a nice idea.) Last, but not least, comes the three-movement *Philharmonic Concerto*, a compact and consummately crafted crowd-pleaser written for the LPO's 1976 tour of the USA. I can report that Yates and company lend it understanding and affectionate advocacy.

So, despite some personal misgivings about both the performance of the symphony and Dutton's somewhat raw sound, there's still plenty on this two-channel hybrid SACD to reward Arnold acolytes. **Andrew Achenbach**

Barber • Bartók • Jarrett

Barber Piano Concerto, Op 38^a

Bartók Piano Concerto No 3, Sz119^b

Jarrett Tokyo Encore: Nothing But the Truth^c

Keith Jarrett *pf* ^a**Saarbrücken Radio Symphony Orchestra / Dennis Russell Davies;** ^b**New Japan Philharmonic Orchestra / Kazuyoshi Akiyama** ECM New Series © 481 1580 (59' • DDD)

Recorded live at the ^aCongresshalle,

Saarbrücken, June 3, 1984; ^bKan-i

Hoken Hall, Tokyo, January 30, 1985



Although many jazz pianists unquestionably play classical music well,

do their performances stack up to those of world-class, full-time classical keyboard practitioners? In the case of these live archival Barber and Bartók Third Concertos with Keith Jarrett, the answer is an unequivocal yes, for the pianist's contributions alone. Put simply, Jarrett's fierce and authoritative command of Barber's difficult piano part is on par with John Browning's benchmark performance. The octave onslaughts are not just accurate and assured but they also have shape and

purpose. And if one might imagine a more nuanced and yielding central 'Canzone', Jarrett's headlong phrasing and strong rhythmic backbone allow Barber's polytextural writing to emerge in firmer perspective than what most of today's slower, spongier traversals deliver. A good example of this is the passage around the four-minute mark, where left-hand chords, long right-hand trills and elaborate filigree interact. Under Dennis Russell Davies the Saarbrücken orchestra make up in energy and tonal heft for what they lack in consistent precision.

The Bartók recording's slightly diffuse ambience creates an equal, chamber-orientated balance between piano and orchestra that fortifies loud string *tuttis* while, at the same time, playing down the relatively weak solo brass. Jarrett's meticulous attention (for the most part, anyway!) to Bartók's phrasings and note values brings out the music's lyrical, speech-like syntax, which all too often sounds dry and percussive in the hands of less idiomatically attuned pianists. Jarrett rewards the appreciative audience with an exquisite improvised solo encore. **Jed Distler**

Barber – selected comparison:

Browning, Cleveland Orch, Szell

(7/65^R, 2/98) (SONY) SMK89751

Beethoven

Piano Concerto No 1, Op 15

Martha Argerich *pf*

Orchestra of the 18th Century / Frans Brüggen

Fryderyk Chopin Institute © DVD NIFCDVD004

(92' • NTSC • 16:9 • DTS5.1 & PCM stereo • 0 • s)

Recorded live at the Witold Lutosławski Concert Studio of Polish Radio, Warsaw, August 28, 2012

Beethoven

Piano Concerto No 3, Op 37

Maria João Pires *pf*

Orchestra of the 18th Century / Frans Brüggen

Fryderyk Chopin Institute © DVD NIFCDVD005

(86' • NTSC • 16:9 • DTS5.1 & PCM stereo • 0 • s)

Recorded live at the Witold Lutosławski Concert Studio of Polish Radio, Warsaw, August 28, 2012

Both DVDs also contain 'The Breath of the Orchestra', a film by Kasia Kasica



Maria João Pires and Martha Argerich – soloists in Beethoven concertos on new Fryderyk Chopin Institute DVDs – join forces on the same Erard instrument



It is rare to hear celebrated pianists playing instruments from an earlier age, which is why these performances by Martha Argerich and Maria João Pires have a special interest. They were filmed on the same evening at the 2012 'Chopin and his Europe' festival in Warsaw. The instrument is a meticulously restored 1849 Erard of the kind which found favour with Chopin in the 1840s. It was also Liszt's preferred piano, understandably so since it was probably the finest instrument of its day before Steinway unveiled its mighty overstrung iron-framed grand in Paris in 1867.

This is not, then, an instrument of Beethoven's period. (For that you must go to Robert Levin's fine Archiv set of the concertos.) Beethoven did own an Erard, presented by the company to 'Mr Bethoffen à Vienne' in 1803, but that was a very different creature to this 1849 model with its metal frame, double escapement action and $7\frac{1}{4}$ octave keyboard.

Both DVDs carry a 40-minute documentary about the orchestra. Worthy as this is, I would have preferred a film about the Erard. With its powerful bass and the bell-like brilliance of its top registers (a tricky combination, unerringly matched by Pires in the wider tessituras of the C minor Concerto), not to mention a system of under-damping which requires fresh thinking about pedalling, it must be a challenge to play. Still, the end results as we have them here are a joy.

Neither pianist plays less brilliantly or less expressively than on a modern grand. It's simply the effects that can be intriguingly different. The brilliance of the Erard's top registers, which so commended the instrument to pianists such as Saint-Saëns and Planté, serves both concertos particularly well. After all, it's in the dash, dazzle and stellar imaginings of these high-lying passages that so much of the inner content of Beethoven's keyboard concertos lies.

The C major Concerto has long been one of Martha Argerich's party pieces. Despite Brüggén's very 'un-period' – 'laboured' would be a less polite term – pacing of the first-movement ritornello, Argerich is able instantly to energise proceedings, driving the music forwards

while at the same time using the Erard's particular sound palette to bring out the *martellato* character of Beethoven's more bullish writing. Similarly in the finale she brings a dashing, jazzy, appropriately improvised feel to the music. In a concerto that needs to be driven, she drives the Erard strongly on. In the more emotionally complex C minor Concerto, Pires prefers a more measured approach, quietly husbanding the instrument's resources with her own sure and discriminating touch.

Pires recently recorded the Third and Fourth concertos with Daniel Harding and the Swedish RSO (Onyx, 10/14), performances which drew an appropriately eloquent response from Bryce Morrison. Here is a pianist, he wrote, who 'appears to do so little and ends by doing everything'. In an age of 'interpretation', Pires's performances 'are simply of another order'. And so it is here. It's a wonderful performance, during which Brüggén and his players come fully into their own. I also find Brüggén a kinder accompanist than Harding, probably because the contemporary fad for making modern orchestras play in a 'period' style can often etiolate the sound or even brutalise it.

Sviatoslav Richter has a diary entry: 'I'm fiercely opposed to televised broadcasts.'

The image prevents you from listening and there's nothing interesting to see.' He might have thought differently here. Watching the touch on this fine old instrument of these two great mistresses of their art, and relishing the sounds they conjure forth, is an education in itself. Both are exceptional releases. **Richard Osborne**

Beethoven · Brahms

Beethoven Violin Concerto, Op 61^a. Symphony No 8, Op 93^b **Brahms** String Sextet No 1, Op 18^c

^aSvetlin Roussev ^{vn} ^cMiguel da Silva, ^aMarie Chilemme ^{vas} ^cHenri Demarquette, ^cAurélien Pascal ^{vcs} ^aSinfonia Varsovia; ^bKansai Philharmonic Orchestra / ^bAugustin Dumay ^{ac/vn} Onyx ® ② ONYX4154 (107 • DDD)

^bRecorded live at Suntory Hall, Tokyo, September 2010



No sooner had I filed my review of Thomas Gould's Riga version of the Beethoven

Violin Concerto (see below) than along comes Augustin Dumay with a comparably refreshing viewpoint. This time the location is the Polish Radio studio in Warsaw, the Sinfonia Varsovia (with whom Dumay has enjoyed a fruitful association stretching back to its formation in 1984) proving willing partners in an unhurried reading, serene and muscular by turns, which displays canny authority, glowing dedication and plentiful interpretative incident. Perhaps not every gesture convinces, but better than an anodyne, safety-first approach; rest assured, there's no whiff of stale routine, and Dumay's customarily stylish, raptly intense showing, to say nothing of his subtly variegated tonal palette, will enthrall his many admirers. Fritz Kreisler's cadenzas are favoured – and imperiously the Frenchman delivers them, too.

Dumay also impresses with the baton in a live account (from September 2010 in Tokyo's Suntory Hall) of Beethoven's Eighth Symphony. He certainly secures eager results from his hard-working Kansai Philharmonic, and the performance as a whole has creditable zest, punch and rhythmic acuity. At the same time, the last ounce of composure is occasionally lacking (in the third movement's Trio for example), and I can't help feeling that the second movement and finale might have benefited from a greater sense of twinkling mischief.

Disc 2 is given over to Brahms's First String Sextet, for which Dumay the wise and experienced chamber musician is joined by five younger colleagues, of whom three (Svetlin Roussev, Miguel

da Silva and Henri Demarquette) are beginning to establish themselves on the international circuit, and the other two (Marie Chilemme and Aurélien Pascal) are exceptionally gifted newcomers at the outset of their careers. Nothing is forced in a memorably intuitive rendering which is intensely appreciative of this heavenly score's generosity of spirit, burnished glow and tumbling lyricism – perhaps nowhere more so than in the inspired theme and variations of the second movement (the delicate hush these players locate at 5'56" takes the breath away). Spontaneity, joy and teamwork are the watchwords, as exemplified by the unfettered exuberance of the *Scherzo*'s bounding Trio section.

Onyx's consistently superior production values, the handsome, cloth-bound presentation and excellent notes by Jeremy Nicholas bolster the appeal of this enticing package, whose two discs retail for the price of one. **Andrew Achenbach**

Beethoven · Vaughan Williams

Beethoven Violin Concerto, Op 61
Vaughan Williams The Lark Ascending
Sinfonietta Riga / **Thomas Gould** ^{vn}

Edition © EDN1058 (60 • DDD)

Recorded live at the Great Guild Hall, Riga,

April 11 & 13, 2014



Recorded live in Riga in front of an exceptionally well-behaved audience,

soloist Thomas Gould (leader of the Aurora Orchestra and co-leader of the Britten Sinfonia) masterminds a delectably articulate and pliant account of the Beethoven Violin Concerto with his bright-eyed and eagerly responsive Latvian colleagues. There's a security, familiarity and silky warmth about Gould's tasteful contribution that many will find gratifying – he's been playing the concerto regularly for a good number of years now. His performance is also notable for its stimulating deployment of Wolfgang Schneiderhan's cadenzas, based in turn on the composer's own that he fashioned for the piano version of the concerto, and which will already be familiar to some collectors from the Austrian virtuoso's much-loved stereo remake of the concerto with Eugen Jochum and the BPO (DG, 11/62). Listen out for the violin's good-humoured banter with the timpanist from 20'19" in the first movement, and the cleverly integrated quotation of the opening measures a little later at 22'02". The *Larghetto* slow movement receives beautifully poised

advocacy, eschewing any suggestion of syrupy affectation or expressive mannerism, and I love the way the linking cadenza towards the close cheekily anticipates the finale's bouncy jig. Indeed, all goes swimmingly in this concluding Rondo: the playing from soloist and chamber orchestra alike has terrific rhythmic élan to commend it, and the joyously toe-tapping swagger of the coda is sure to raise a smile.

I also derived heaps of pleasure from this team's profoundly sensitive rendering of *The Lark Ascending*. Gould soars aloft with effortless grace, tenderness and fragrant poetry, and the performance as a whole serves up a most moving distillation of transportive ecstasy, loss and heartache. Plaudits, too, for the naturally balanced, finely focused and full-bodied sound picture achieved by Normunds Šnē, who also happens to be Sinfonietta Riga's Artistic Director and Chief Conductor – clearly a man of many talents! This coupling from Edition Classics earns an enthusiastic thumbs-up. **Andrew Achenbach**

Beethoven

Symphonies – No 1, Op 21; No 2, Op 36

Vienna Academy Orchestra / **Martin Haselböck**
Alpha © ALPHA470 (57 • DDD)

Recorded live at the Landhausaal, Palais Niederösterreich, Vienna, December 7-9, 2014



As ever with Martin Haselböck, the overall agenda on this disc centres firmly on

historic performance practice. After his series of Liszt orchestral works, also with the Orchester Wiener Akademie (NCA), come the Beethoven symphonies recorded in the Viennese venues where they were first performed (four of the six halls still exist today, apparently). According to established sources these were the KK Hoftheater nächst der Burg for No 1 and the Theater an der Wien for No 2. Both of the present performances were recorded at the Landhausaal, Palais Niederösterreich, though, which I'm presuming is one of the 'eight Viennese halls and theatres where the composer's orchestral works were performed in his lifetime' (I quote the booklet-note). So not quite what it says on the tin, as they say, but a good, resonant acoustic for what are basically sound 'period' performances, energetic and true.

Haselböck phrases the First Symphony's opening *Adagio molto* very attentively and sticks with the fast metronome for the ensuing *Allegro con brio*. The second subject



'A delectably articulate and pliant account of the Beethoven Violin Concerto': Thomas Gould and Sinfonietta Riga recording their new disc for Edition Classics

sounds a little hurried but the momentum is maintained well throughout the development section, which is nicely pointed and, again, effectively articulated. The second movement strides forth with what sounds like imperious indifference and some lack of affection; the *Scherzo* wants for detail among the tims, which certainly doesn't apply at the start of the finale, the main body of which fires off on all cylinders.

The Second Symphony's slow introduction has little sense of gravitas about it: Haselböck cues a firm, no-nonsense statement that contrasts markedly with, say, Brüggén (his latest recording especially) and Skrowaczewski. The properly swift *Allegro con brio* battles away heroically, though the strings are sometimes overwhelmed by the brass. The *Larghetto* is chaste and kept very much on the move, the energetic *Scherzo* and finale treated to lively, well-differentiated tempi. So the message comes across loud and clear, or at least most of it does. For added depth and perspective I'd recommend Skrowaczewski (Oehms) and Brüggén (Glossa, 1/13) with Zinman (RCA, 5/99) in reserve – the Old Guard of Karajan, Klemperer, Toscanini, Furtwängler et al is something else again – though it'll be interesting to see how this Haselböck series

develops. Initial impressions are at the very least encouraging. **Rob Cowan**

Beethoven

Symphony No 6, 'Pastoral', Op 68^a.

Egmont, Op 84 - Overture^b

London Philharmonic Orchestra /

Klaus Tennstedt

LPO © LPO0085 (55' • ADD)

Recorded live at the Royal Festival Hall, London,

^aSeptember 26, 1991, ^bFebruary 21, 1992



Listening to this entrancing and yet deeply affecting performance of

Beethoven's *Pastoral* Symphony, it is easy see why, with all the old 'greats' dead and gone, it was Klaus Tennstedt whom in the early 1990s Carlos Kleiber rated above all survivors. Tennstedt was a conductor of genius whose nervous bewilderment in the face of the world and its ways both fed that genius and crippled his health. Which may explain why the *Pastoral* Symphony spoke so directly to him and why he was able to meet this incomparable work on the same imaginative ground which Beethoven trod when he created it.

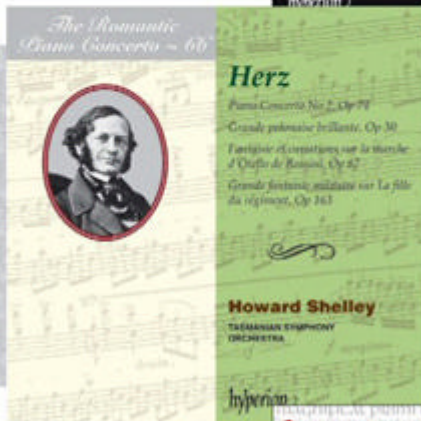
As on his earlier studio recording (HMV, 1/87 – nla), Tennstedt takes a briskish tempo in the opening movement. This isn't metronome-mongering (Tennstedt was innocent of such things). It is simply his instinctive response to the pulse of the poet's own motion and imaginings. With warm-bodied strings and a fresh-voiced wind choir, the LPO was also the ideal medium for Tennstedt's reading. Their playing is a joy, finely sprung ostinato rhythms buoying the visionary wind descants that carol above. Happily, the BBC recording is exemplary. In the attendant overture, taken from a different Festival Hall concert, the wind balances are all over the place.

The LPO editors do us no favours by prefacing the *Pastoral* with a rather ruminative account of the *Egmont* Overture. One of the wonders of Beethoven's F major idyll is that we hear nothing of the minor key until the storm. The *Egmont* Overture is also in F, minatory minor turning eventually to triumphant major, which makes it a poor companion piece for the *Pastoral*. Still, the editors must be commended for removing the applause from the end of the *Pastoral*. This is a visionary performance and it deserves its own quietus. **Richard Osborne**

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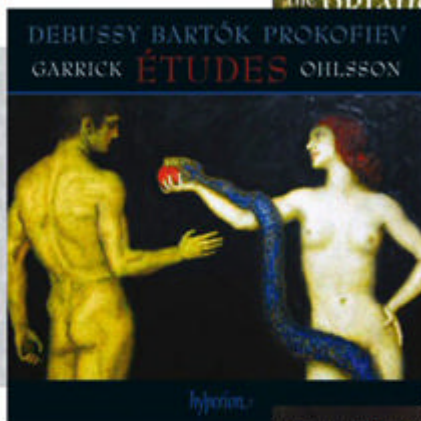
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Berlioz

Harold en Italie, Op 16^a. Rêverie et Caprice, Op 8^b. Intrata di Rob-Roy Mac Gregor
James Ehnes ^{bvn/va} **Melbourne Symphony Orchestra / Sir Andrew Davis**
 Chandos (F) CHSA5155 (64' • DDD/DSD)



Chandos's new release continues a potential Berlioz cycle from Sir Andrew, following his well-received Overtures disc with the Bergen Philharmonic (5/13). This release neatly rounds up the loose ends of *Rêverie et Caprice* (the composer's only solo violin work) and the still strangely neglected *Rob Roy*, Berlioz's second Walter Scott-based overture, which makes teasing use of the patriotic ballad 'Scots wha hae wi Wallace bled'. The Paris Conservatoire audience of 1833 didn't like it at all but two of the melodies were moved seamlessly from the Scottish to the Italian mountains the following year when Berlioz began his Byron-based viola work for Paganini.

Concerto or symphony? Not enough of the former, thought the celebrity-conscious string virtuoso at first – and that issue has sometimes become a more practical musical one of basic balance between soloist and modern orchestra. How naturally that problem is swept away, however, is made apparent by the success of the 'original' instrument recordings under John Eliot Gardiner (Philips, 8/96) and Marc Minkowski (Naïve, 2/12), the latter in its pacing and pretty well operatic narrative clarity a worthy follow-up to his *Symphonie fantastique*. Like Beecham (with William Primrose, studio, or Frederick Riddle, live, and the RPO), Minkowski and his Musiciens du Louvre attack the sudden dynamic and harmonic surprises in the outer movements with limitless glee. And the 'old' instrument balance more than takes care of letting the soloist be heard.

For Chandos in Australia, Davis and his production team have worked hard to keep James Ehnes's quite ravishingly beautiful playing in focus. The Melbourners play this still testing score well for their Chief Conductor. It sounds as if Davis sees the work as more lyrical and Romantic – a true stablemate of Mendelssohn's almost exactly contemporary *Italian Symphony* – than as a sequel to the experimentation of the *Fantastique*. As such he relishes the cut and thrust of programmatic mountain danger less than Minkowski or Beecham. But he sets his soloist off well and gives worthwhile accounts of the shorter pieces.

Mike Ashman

Berlioz

'Of Madness and Love'
 La mort de Cléopâtre^a. Overture, 'King Lear', Op 4. Rêverie et Caprice, Op 8^b. Roméo et Juliette, Op 17 – Love Scene
^a**Vesselina Kasarova** *mez* ^b**Soyoung Yoon** *vn*
Basel Symphony Orchestra / Ivor Bolton
 Solo Musica (F) SOB08 (60' • DDD)



The booklet's claim 'inspired by William Shakespeare' is only really true of the *Roméo et Juliette* excerpt and the *Lear* Overture (and even that has been disputed). But the mini violin concerto *Rêverie* – seductively played here by the Basel orchestra's Korean concertmaster – was probably inspired by Berlioz's troubles with the Shakespearean actress Harriet Smithson and has some musical relationship with his *Roméo*. There was of course a Shakespeare *Antony and Cleopatra*, but Berlioz's setting uses Pierre-Angé Vieillard's composition text for the Prix de Rome of 1829 on the Egyptian queen's dying words, written in the *nouveau* Racine style.

It is in some ways a pity that the latter work takes pride of place in this recital of (mostly) still not too well-known works. The Prix's judges were probably expecting some well-organised and essentially platform-bound recitation of regal grief. They got two full-on operatic scenes of psychological breakdown with (in the 'Méditation') a running *Boléro*-like build-up towards a literally evoked death by snakebite. Up against intense competition from Janet Baker, Véronique Gens and Anna Caterina Antonacci – to name three favourites of varying timbres – Vesselina Kasarova sounds a little out of sorts. Despite undoubted dramatic input (the climax around Cleopatra's defeat at Actium in the first-movement *Allegro vivace*), her French is muddy and, as caught here, some of the solo's large range sounds too high for her comfort and pinpoint accuracy.

The orchestra – its range of colour extended by natural horns, trumpets and trombones and 'historic' timpani – plays wonderfully well for Bolton throughout the programme. A dark and moody 'Scène d'amour' from *Roméo* really emphasises the composer's radicalism in setting one of literature's great exchanges of passion without human voices and words – a kind of reverse of the direction Wagner was moving in. A worthwhile booklet interview with the conductor

traces details of what he calls Berlioz's 'experimental and at the same time precise' instrumentation.

Hear this release for the programme and for Ivor Bolton's and his orchestra's contribution; look elsewhere for the cantata.

Mike Ashman

Birtwistle

Birtwistle Angel Fighter^a. In Broken Images. Virelai (Sus une fontayne)

^a**Andrew Watts** *countertenor*

^a**Jeffrey Lloyd-Roberts** *ten*

^a**BBC Singers; London Sinfonietta / David Atherton**
 NMC (F) NMCD211 (54' • DDD • T)



As co-founder of the London Sinfonietta in 1968, David Atherton has been responsible for several Birtwistle premieres down the decades: his first was the English Opera Group production of *Punch and Judy*, just as the Sinfonietta was being set up. Now, more than 40 years on, they and Atherton return with a group of recent Birtwistle scores; and anyone in 2015 disposed to expect ageing dinosaurs going through the motions should be struck by the energy and sharpness of response in these recordings.

Sharpness – remaining consistent without falling back into cliché – is also what Birtwistle's music is about. The poem by Robert Graves that lies behind *In Broken Images* refers disarmingly to 'a new understanding of my confusion' as a result of becoming 'sharp, mistrusting my broken images', and Birtwistle's music today is just as lacking in complacency as it was in 1968. *Angel Fighter* starts with the advantage of a pithy text by Stephen Plaice, librettist of *The Io Passion* (one of several large-scale Birtwistle works still awaiting commercial recording), and this 'dramatic episode from Genesis' depicts the brutal confrontation between a human sinner, Jacob (tenor), and an implacably euphonious angel (countertenor). The moral, for a secular age, might be that human uncertainty and pain are bound to be more true to life than angelic confidence and calm – or so Jacob's ascending vocal line at the end, refusing to emulate the angel's self-assurance, seems to suggest.

Angel Fighter owes as much to terse commentaries from choir and instruments as to extended dialogues between the admirable solo singers, and Atherton couples scrupulous attention to detail with exemplary alertness to the steadily unfolding shape of the whole. *In Broken Images* is no less vividly realised, its fractured progress

from celebratory rite to desolate yet resolute ending ringing fresh changes on familiar Birtwistle sound materials. With *Virelai*, a short, sharp rejigging of ancient musical fragments in an entirely contemporary spirit, this CD is a pungent and persuasive statement about what properly serious music can achieve today. **Arnold Whittall**

Brahms

Serenade No 2, Op 16. Alto Rhapsody, Op 53.
Symphony No 2, Op 73

^aSara Mingardo *contr* ^aBavarian Radio Choir;

Lucerne Festival Orchestra / Andris Nelsons

Video director **Michael Beyer**

Accentus (DVD ACC20325; (D) ACC10325

(109' • NTSC • 16:9 • 1080i • DTS-HD MA5.1,
DTS5.1 & PCM stereo • D)

Recorded live at the Concert Hall of KKL Lucerne,
August 15-16, 2014



The eye is a great deceiver. Watch these Lucerne Festival Brahms performances and you

might think you are in the presence of something special, so assiduously has Andris Nelsons choreographed his role as baton-master. I listened first and watched later, which produced a rather different set of impressions.

After Claudio Abbado's death in January 2014, Nelsons inherited Abbado's Lucerne Festival 'Orchestra of Soloists'. He also inherited the 2014 programme which Abbado had built around the theme of Psyche. Hence the positioning of Brahms's private psychodrama the *Alto Rhapsody* at the heart of this all-Brahms evening. Not that the performance delves particularly deeply into the mood that informs the protagonist's trackless wanderings or his mindset in the work's emotionally riven central section. The best of this Lucerne performance is the C major close, luminously realised.

Elsewhere, both the serenade and the symphony fall prey to Nelsons's slow and self-indulgent way with Brahms's music. Unfamiliarity may explain his lack of touch in the joyous and idiosyncratically scored Op 16 Serenade, though it is flaccid tempi, and the manipulations of line and phrase that are offered by way of compensation for this, which dampen the impact of the bucolic outer movements and becalm the remarkable slow movement.

The 'orchestra of soloists' may also be a contributory factor, Nelsons making space for individual players to have their say. Similarly, the chance to create the kind of sound palette with which the

Second Symphony's bleaker moments can be painted is not one that the makeshift circumstances of the 2014 concert would readily have afforded Nelsons.

That said, his conducting of the symphony is hugely self-indulgent, both in its choice of tempi and in its resort to big-band sonority as a way of enforcing interest. Certainly I can't recall any recorded performance in which the two opening movements were slower than they are here, not even from Kurt Sanderling, whose mastery of the long view is in a different league from that of Nelsons.

These then are performances to be seen rather than heard. Even so, you may want to avert your gaze from the visual pantomime which Nelsons enacts at the start of the symphony's *Allegretto grazioso*. Happily one person who isn't watching is the first oboe. **Richard Osborne**

Brian

Symphonies – No 6, 'Sinfonia tragica';
No 28; No 29; No 31

New Russia State Symphony Orchestra /

Alexander Walker

Naxos (D) 8 573408 (70' • DDD)



Mirabile dictu: a release of four Havergal Brian symphonies – cause for celebration in itself –

two of which have not been recorded before! What a diverse set they make, too, remarkably so given the later three date from 18 months during 1967–68.

Alexander Walker's interpretations of Nos 6 and 31 stand up well against their older rivals (Mackerras's No 31 for EMI is currently unavailable) and in the *Sinfonia tragica* (1947–48, reworked from material for an abandoned opera on Synge's *Deirdre of the Sorrows*) he produces a marvellously nuanced, rather Russian-sounding performance, with some occasionally Shostakovichian brass. Comparisons with Fredman reveal a few infelicities of ensemble and two curious errors: the solo trumpeter is too loud and forwardly placed, so that his early fanfares lack the mystery they need, and only a single side-drummer seems to be used, instead of the three Brian required, so that the tramp of doom that gradually overtakes the music does not have the bite Brian wanted, and Fredman delivered.

Walker's feel for line and melody pays dividends in the shaping of the big melody at the centre of No 6, throughout the whole of No 31 and at the beguilingly pastoral opening of No 28. This last was premiered, controversially, by the nonagenarian

Stokowski the year after Brian's death in 1972, in a performance that in places amounted to a complete misreading. In this second performance, No 28 emerges as wonderfully compelling, with its alternation of the violent and lyrical. The celebratory No 29, in four movements like its predecessor, and luminous No 31 are bright examples of Brian's late polyphonic style. The New Russia State Symphony Orchestra do the music proud. The sound quality is very good, too, as it needs to be for Brian's complex, multi-layered invention. Recommended. **Guy Rickards**

Symphony 6 – comparative version:

LPO, Fredman (9/08) (LYRI) SRCD295

Busoni • Mahler • Wagner • Zemlinsky

Busoni Berceuse élégiaque (arr Stein)

Mahler Lieder eines fahrenden Gesellen

(arr Schoenberg)^a Wagner Siegfried Idyll

Zemlinsky Sechs Gesänge, Op 13 (arr Austin)^b

^bKatie Bray *mez* ^aGareth Brynmor John *bar*

Royal Academy of Music Soloists Ensemble /

Trevor Pinnock

Linn (D) CKD481 (61' • DDD/DSD • T/t)



The first two instalments of Trevor Pinnock's series with the RAM Soloists

Ensemble featured whole Austro-German symphonies arranged in chamber form. This third disc offers arrangements of something different. Mahler's *Lieder eines fahrenden Gesellen* and Zemlinsky's *Maeterlinck-Lieder* both, of course, started out in piano versions before being orchestrated by their composers. Even Busoni's haunting *Berceuse élégiaque* began life as a piano piece, before he expanded it into the orchestral version, premiered, incidentally, by Mahler and the New York Philharmonic in early 1911.

Here the Busoni is performed in the arrangement for chamber forces by Erwin Stein; the Mahler comes in Schoenberg's arrangements; the Zemlinsky in new versions by Christopher Austin. The Wagner, in a departure for the series, is in its original form. All four works together make for a well-balanced programme and the playing of the Royal Academy of Music chamber soloists is pleasingly flexible throughout, Linn's excellent engineering airy but detailed. The two singers involved, however, deserve better billing than they get on the packaging – one only finds out who they are by delving deep into the booklet to find their biographies. Both are RAM graduates at the start of promising careers. Gareth Brynmor John is a sensitive guide

through the Mahler, even if his voice – light in timbre – as yet lacks colouristic variety or the interpretative sophistication that Bernarda Fink brought to her performances of this same version on her recent Harmonia Mundi disc (8/14). Katie Bray's mezzo is richly spiced and colourful in potent performances of the Zemlinsky, and Austin's new arrangements manage to capture the best of both worlds, encompassing the quasi-symphonic and the beautifully intimate.

Pinnock and his players offer relatively swift accounts of the purely instrumental works but they never feel rushed. This performance of the Busoni comes in more than two minutes under that by Diabolicus on their fine Naïve disc but is no less atmospheric, with Michael Foyle's sinuous, snaking violin solos worth special mention. The Wagner, meanwhile, is beautifully mellow, bringing the disc to a lovingly shaped, gentle conclusion.

Hugo Shirley

*Busoni, Wagner – selected comparison:
Diabolicus, Henschel (11/08) (NAIV) AM137*

Delalande

Symphonies pour les soupers du Roy: Suites – No 1; No 3; No 5; Caprices – No 1, 'Caprice de Villers-Cotterets'; No 3; Grande Pièce, 'Fantaisie ou Caprice que le Roy demandoit souvent'

Elbipolis Baroque Orchestra, Hamburg /

Jürgen Gross *vn*

Challenge Classics © CC72664 (62' • DDD)



Listeners to this attractive CD need to know from the outset that what they are

hearing is only partly Delalande (or Lalande, as he was also known). The music he composed to be performed when Louis XIV and the young Louis XV dined formally was copied and collected in mainly two- and three-part reduced scores after his death, examples of which can be accessed online. The original instrumentation is only hinted at, the real number of parts uncertain but maybe as many as five; and, significantly, the parts contain no ornamentation. So at best the versions prepared for this recording by Elbipolis's harpsichordist Jörg Jacobi are third-generation and reflect his assumptions and tastes.

The immensely able Elbipolis Barockorchester Hamburg is led by the violinist Jürgen Gross, who takes several solo turns, but others – including the bassoonist Katrin Lazar, theorbist Ophira

Zakai and percussionist Michael Metzler – also deliver stylish performances, with particular respect to Jacobi's arrangements. This is their first recording of French music and is characterised by delicacy, warmth and clarity.

Delalande, the contemporary of Marais, La Guerre and Couperin, was esteemed above all others, recognised and richly rewarded by Louis XIV. Unlike them, he saw none of his music into print, so his wishes must in part be inferred from the practices of his contemporaries. At odds with those practices are Jacobi's decisions to compose frequent *contreparties* for the bassoon (rather than a bass viola da gamba) as in trs 4, 11, 21 and 26, and, further, to pair it with violin as in trs 11, 21 and 22 (rather than with a cello or viol in the *petit chœur* passages; the usual practice was to pair it with oboe). Jacobi may have taken encouragement from the posthumous manuscript I consulted: exceptionally, in the *Grande Pièce* (tr 11), when the bass part divides in two the parts are marked 'bassons'. His arrangement of the 'Loure' (tr 14) achieves a lovely haze that evokes the sound of a musette (French bagpipe); the addition of sopranino recorders in trs 3, 10 and 27 is festive. Nonetheless, *caveat emptor*. **Julie Anne Sadie**



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Dvořák • Janáček • Suk

Dvořák Violin Concerto, Op 53 B96

Janáček Violin Concerto, 'The Wandering of a Little Soul' **Suk** Fantasy, Op 24

Josef Špaček *vn*

Czech Philharmonic Orchestra / Jiří Bělohlávek
Supraphon © SU4182-2 (66' • DDD)



Regarding Dvořák's Concerto, the obvious first-stop comparison is with Frank Peter

Zimmermann's 2013 recording, also with the Czech Philharmonic under Bělohlávek, released last year as part of Decca's six-CD set devoted to the composer's complete symphonies and concertos. Both versions were recorded in Prague's Rudolfinum; but while Decca opts for a fairly natural balance, Supraphon prefers to keep the soloist closer to hand. This is a keen-edged, sharply focused production that seems to mirror Bělohlávek's marginally more dramatic conducting. Where Zimmermann's relative refinement harks back to Nathan Milstein (whose two stereo recordings for EMI remain among the most poised ever made), the young Josef Špaček reminded me more both of his great forebear Josef Suk and, at times, of David Oistrakh.

It's mostly to do with the firm cut of his bowing, the clarity of his articulation and the sureness of his rhythmic attack. His tone is sweetly expressive but he varies it according to the dictates of the passing musical phrase, both in the Dvořák Concerto and in the dizzyingly fanciful Suk Fantasy, an expansive 23 minutes' worth that sees him approximate the throes of musical passion, a fair match for Suk Jnr and Neumann.

As to the Janáček Concerto, which was pieced together from sketches in 1988 and is often redolent of both the Sinfonietta and the Capriccio, Špaček is perhaps less intense than Thomas Zehetmair with the Philharmonia (Apex), though Bělohlávek's Czech accompaniment has marginally more flavour than its rival under Heinz Holliger. A new version from James Ehnes with the Bergen Philharmonic conducted by Edward Gardner (Chandos – see page 34) makes the most of the work's lyrical elements, but this Supraphon version captures the Concerto's strident quirkiness to a T. Indeed, viewed as a whole, Špaček's programme takes us on a stimulating 66-minute journey from dancing Romanticism to bold pre-modernism, and it is certainly one I'll want to take again – fairly soon at that. **Rob Cowan**

Dvořák – selected comparison:

FP Zimmermann, Czech PO, Bělohlávek
(9/14) (DECC) 478 6757DX6

Janáček – selected comparisons:

Zehetmair, Philb Orch, Holliger

(3/93⁸) (APEX) 0927 40812-2

Ehnes, Bergen PO, Gardner (7/15) (CHAN) CHSA5156

Suk – selected comparison:

Suk, Czech PO, Neumann (8/11) (SUPR) SU4047-2

Grieg

Piano Concerto, Op 16^a. Lyric Pieces – Op 12, No 1 'Arietta'; Op 38 No 8, 'Waltz'; Op 43 No 1, 'Butterfly'; Op 47 No 3, 'Melody'; Op 43 No 2, 'Lonely Wanderer'; Op 54 No 3, 'March of the Trolls'; Op 54 No 4, 'Nocturne'; Op 57 No 6, 'Homesickness'; Op 68 No 3, 'At your feet'; Op 68 No 5, 'At the cradle'; Op 71 No 1, 'Once upon a Time'; Op 71 No 7, 'Remembrance'

Javier Perianes *pf*

BBC Symphony / Sakari Oramo Harmonia Mundi © HMC90 2205 (70' • DDD) ^aRecorded live at the Barbican, London, October 24, 2014



It takes a brave man to record the Grieg Piano Concerto with the spectres of pianists

such as Lipatti, Michelangeli, Lupu, Perahia and Andsnes long celebrated on disc. But the young Spanish virtuoso Javier Perianes's performance is of such a fearless and arresting brilliance that it virtually erases memories of the past. For here is the Grieg restored to all its first icy, northern and unsentimental glory. Again, if a more tearless Grieg is hard to imagine, such clear-sightedness is complemented by melting poetry in, for example, the first movement's second subject. The BBC Symphony Orchestra under Sakari Oramo are with their soloist all the way so that you may well find yourself falling in love and in awe all over again with this evergreen Romantic masterpiece.

For his coupling, Perianes opts for a selection of the *Lyric Pieces* (Grieg's confessional diary) rather than the standard offering of the Schumann Concerto. Like Gilels on his legendary disc (DG, 2/97), he unveils a whole world of intimate feeling and I doubt whether the 'Nocturne', to take a single example, has often been played with such rapt intensity. Perianes is memorably sensitive to Grieg's alternating euphoria and depression in 'Homesickness' and 'At your feet', ending, like Gilels, with 'Remembrance', that heart-stopping valedictory waltz. Harmonia Mundi's sound is crystal-clear, crowning a record that confirms Liszt's admiration for Grieg and erases sniping estimates by Debussy and, more recently, Alfred Brendel.

Bryce Morrison

Haydn • Mozart

Haydn Sinfonia concertante, Hobl/105^a **Mozart** Oboe Concerto, K314^b. Bassoon Concerto, K191^c

^a**Alfredo Bernardini** *ob* ^a**Peter Whelan** *bn*

^a**Ilya Gringolts** *vn* ^b**Nicolas Altstaedt** *vc*

Arcangelo / Jonathan Cohen

Hyperion © CDA68090 (58' • DDD)



How good to see Haydn's *Sinfonia concertante* given star billing. Usually it's used

as a filler, often to a 'London' Symphony or two, or jammed on the end of a set of Symphonies Nos 88-92 to round out the discs. Here it's enterprisingly coupled with two of Mozart's earlier woodwind concertos on a recording that's a bit of a winner.

The trouble with treating it as a filler is that it can seem an afterthought, played dutifully by section principals at the end of a long session. It deserves so much more than that, though, and there's nothing dutiful here, with leading soloists drafted in and the period band Arcangelo on top form. Not only is there fine focus to the oboe and bassoon (the two strings take a while to 'bed in' but soon meet the standards set by their woodwind partners, though Altstaedt's cello doesn't penetrate the texture as keenly as it might) but every solo line is thoughtfully inflected, as if this were really four solo concertos being played at the same time. You sense the fun they have with the music while never playing fast and loose with the basic pulse. A joy from start to finish.

Mozart's concertos for oboe and bassoon, while slighter works, are performed with the same devotion and skill. Alfredo Bernardini's two-key oboe quacks deliciously, while there are plangency and gruffness in equal measure as Peter Whelan exploits the compass of his bassoon (the one instrument whose provenance isn't identified in the booklet). Otherwise comprehensive notes by Richard Wigmore of this parish provide further gloss on one of the loveliest recent discs of this repertoire. **David Threasher**

Haydn • WF Bach

'Haydn 2032 – No 2, II Filosofo'

WF Bach Symphony, BR C2 Fk67 **Haydn**

Symphonies – No 22, 'Philosopher'; No 46; No 47

Il Giardino Armonico / Giovanni Antonini

Alpha © ALPHA671 (75' • DDD)



Giovanni Antonini's 'Haydn 2032' project continues in the same vein as Vol 1 (3/15),



The oboist Alfredo Bernadini, soloist on Arcangelo's fine new disc of concertante works by Mozart and Haydn on Hyperion

with a selection of symphonies from the composer's *Sturm und Drang* period. Present once again are the pinpoint accuracy of the strings in driven tempi, brazen horns (an essential presence in all three works here) and oboes (in Nos 46 and 47) piercing through the texture. That's a boon especially in a work such as Symphony No 46, in the rare key of B major, for which Haydn had to have new crooks made for his horn players. It's usually given a fairly tentative reading on disc, the extreme key probably as much to blame as foreshortened rehearsal time for its not being ideally under players' fingers.

No fear of that here, though. Il Giardino Armonico launch into it as though it were their calling card, revelling in its gymnastics but bringing a genuine warmth to the siciliano slow movement. Ditto for No 47, the one that so inspired Mozart (he made a copy of the score to study, the influence of which echoes in the opening rhythms of so many of his Viennese piano concertos). Symphony No 22 gives the disc its title and discards oboes for the mellower sound of corno anglois, mournfully intoning their way through that wonderful opening slow movement. Context is provided in a symphony by WF Bach, the eldest son of Johann Sebastian. This is one of a group of five dated by *Grove* to c1735-40 and veers

from the French *ouverture* rhythms of its opening to more *galant* posturing, albeit exploiting dissonances that would have made Bach *père's* wig quiver.

A harpsichord is present in the Bach but (thankfully) not in the three Haydn symphonies. The usual gripe: minuets are taken far too fast, tripping up the hypothetical dancers and preventing the phrases from breathing – a shame as each of the three minuets and trios contains something unique to delight the ear.

David Thresher

Haydn

'Paris Symphonies'

Symphonies – No 82, 'Bear'; No 83, 'Hen'; No 84; No 85, 'La Reine'; No 86; No 87

Zurich Chamber Orchestra / Sir Roger Norrington

Sony Classical © 88875 02133-2 (165' • DDD)



challenging (and even snook-cocking) approach to Haydn's 'Paris' Symphonies. These have already attracted a fair amount of excoriation online, but repeated listening has

revealed some deeper insights that appear to be lost on those who would only cavil at the surprising lick at which he takes the slow movement of *La Reine*. Yes, perhaps that's a misfire; but Norrington's reasoning is sound, even if the result is a little comical.

Norrington's means and ways are most similar to Thomas Fey's (Hänssler Classic, 1/11), with a small band playing modern instruments (strings, of course, *senza vibrato*). The sound is thus naturally far more 'blended' than the glorious contrasts highlighted by Antonini (see above) but wind and brass stand in a semicircle around the back of the string group and are thus spotlit as soloists throughout. Norrington has paid minute attention to the shape and direction of phrases, so the simplest of lines leaps from the page as a vital and attention-grabbing element. Even chugging strings of semiquavers in inner voices bulge and throb; and you may be struck by the eloquence of the clucking oboe in the second subject of the opening movement of the *Hen* Symphony.

And what of those speeds? Outer movements have a zesty drive, while go-ahead tempi prevent slow movements from becoming static. There's a pleasing lilt to, say, the *Allegretto* of the *Bear*. Norrington's point in that contentious

tempo for the Romance of No 85, *La Reine de France*, is that it bears the same *allegretto* marking and should thus be closely related in tempo to similarly designated movements. It certainly brings out the folksy nature of the piece; and perhaps those scything string scales at the first *forte* are supposed to foretell the fall of the guillotine that was so soon to become a pain in the neck for the symphony's namesake.

The Minuets, however, Norrington paces perfectly, demonstrating that it is possible to let phrases breathe and Haydn's trademark humour to glow through these dance movements. Only Symphony No 86 disappoints – minuscule lapses in ensemble and intonation might have been tidied up – and the omission of the final repeat in No 84 is a puzzle (it's not as though space is at a premium on this bargain three-disc set). If you like your Haydn thought-out and thought-provoking, ignore the roadkill on the information superhighway and incline an ear towards Norrington. His didacticism may tumble into dogma and mannerism on occasion but, listening, you simply know he loves every note. **David Thresher**

Henze

Il Vitalino raddoppiato^a. Violin Concerto No 2^b

Peter Sheppard Skærved *vn*^b/*cond*^b **Omar**

Ebrahim *spkr*^a **Longbow**; ^b**Parnassus Ensemble**

London / Hans Werner Henze

Naxos © 8 573289 (68' • DDD)

^bRecorded 1991



In his vivid booklet-note (one of the best I have read for a long while, both informative

and entertaining), Peter Sheppard Skærved calls *Il Vitalino raddoppiato* (1977) 'this exquisite work' and he is absolutely on the money. Its unusual design is scarcely any more unconventional than that of the Second Concerto (1971), being a 'chaconne on a chaconne', the original by the eponymous Tomaso Vitali. It is a beautifully achieved, experimental reinterpretation of a Classical model, however, exploring the relationship between soloist to ensemble as much as that of modern composer to respected forebear (although Skærved's retelling of Henze's 'actual plot' casts a fascinating – and hilarious – light on how far that respect extended).

On paper, the Second Concerto's curious form (commented on before in these pages; see the comparative reviews listed below) sounds like 1970s agitprop. The soloist – dressed as Baron Munchhausen, replete with cape and feathered hat – arrives so

late (again Skærved has a funny story about that!) that orchestra, with narrator, start without him; and by the unaccompanied close he has at points functioned as second narrator and purloined the conductor's baton. What is remarkable is that in this 1991 performance, expertly remastered, the work comes alive in a way neither rival account manages, even that by Langbein, who premiered it. Henze's expert direction melds the disparate threads such that they flow with utmost logic. Where some composers wear polystylism as a cloak – or mask – with Henze it comes from within as a natural response to the musical challenges encountered.

Through it all, Skærved weaves his haunting presence as *primus inter pares* in what can be heard as expanded chamber music. A superb disc; I must now explore his earlier disc of Nos 1 and 3 (12/06).

Highly recommended. **Guy Rickards**

Vn Conc No 2 – comparative versions:

Langbein, London Sinfonietta, Henze

(11/74⁸) (DECC) 430 347-2DM

Janicke, Mädlar, Magdeburg PO, Ebrwald

(10/05) (MDG) MDG601 1242-2

d'Indy

'Orchestral Works, Vol 6'

Wallenstein, Op 12. **Fervaal** – Act 3, Prelude.

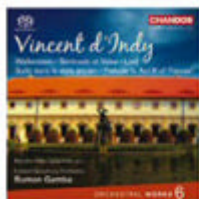
Lied, Op 19^a. **Suite dans le style ancien**, Op 24.

Sérénade et Valse, Op 28

^a**Bryndís Halla Gylfadóttir** *vc*

Iceland Symphony Orchestra / Rumon Gamba

Chandos © CHSA5157 (75' • DDD/DSD)



Rumon Gamba's d'Indy series – this is the final instalment – has done much to illuminate the complexities surrounding one of *fin de siècle* music's more controversial figures. D'Indy, like Wagner, was both progressive and reactionary, and our image of the forward-looking teacher – his pupils included Roussel, Albéniz, Varèse and Cole Porter – still squares uneasily with the reality of the right-wing anti-Dreyfusard ideologue, obsessed with ideas of national identity and ethnic superiority. Influential in his lifetime, his music has an eclectic, pivotal feel, overtly synthesising influences in order to explore new possibilities.

The main work here is *Wallenstein*, completed in 1879, a symphonic trilogy based on Schiller, usually described as a response to *The Ring*, which d'Indy heard at Bayreuth in 1876. A variant of Wagner's sword motif characterises the titular hero, a treacherous army officer trapped Wotan-like in schemes of his own devising. Yet the

melodic contours suggest the predominant influence of Berlioz; the cyclic form derives from Franck; and a weird chordal sequence depicting the superstitious Wallenstein's astrological consultations startlingly prefigures the Nietzsche setting in Mahler's Third Symphony.

Elsewhere, we find comparable links and overtones. The 1897 opera *Fervaal* is indebted to *Parsifal*, its Act 3 Prelude pivoting back to Klingsor's incantations and forward to *Pelléas. Suite dans le style ancien* is not so much a work of Rococo pastiche as an astringent intimation of 20th-century neo-classicism. The beautiful *Lied* for cello and orchestra invites comparisons with Massenet, a rival of whom d'Indy was not particularly fond.

Gamba's conducting evinces the care and thought characteristic of the retrospective as a whole. There's an admirable awareness of the crafted sensuousness of d'Indy's textures, the slightly studied novelty of his compositional style. The Iceland Symphony Orchestra's brass glare a bit, though the playing is judiciously honed. Cellist Bryndís Halla Gylfadóttir sounds very svelte in the *Lied*. D'Indy's reabsorption into the mainstream is a questionable prospect at best. But the series forcefully reminds us of his achievement and importance. **Tim Ashley**

Janáček

'Orchestral Works, Vol 2'

Jealousy. Violin Concerto, 'The Wandering of a Little Soul'^a. **The Ballad of Blaník**. **The Fiddler's Child**. **The Danube**^b. **Taras Bulba**

^b**Susanna Andersson** *sop*^a **James Ehnes** *vn*

Bergen Philharmonic Orchestra / Edward Gardner

Chandos © CHSA5156 (78' • DDD/DSD)



Apart from *Taras Bulba*, one of Janáček's more straightforward works and one given a

strong and eloquent performance here, Vol 2 of Chandos's selection consists of some of his most unusual inventions. *Jealousy*, planned as an introduction to *Jenůfa*, was abandoned early on, surely with good reason, in favour of the inexorable trundling of the mill-wheel as the curtain goes up, though it is a vivid expression of an emotion that charges the opera. Another 'pre-opera' work was the Violin Concerto, rescued by Miloš Štědrň and Leoš Faltus from sketches for an overture to *From the House of the Dead* but not performed until 1988. However, the music's evolution is uncertain and Janáček seems to have been taking it in another direction: John Tyrrell, whose very full notes are invaluable in

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helping us pick our way through the labyrinthine provenance of these works, even thinks that its strange subtitle, *The Wandering of a Little Soul*, may be connected to a death in the General Strike during Janáček's visit to London. It is not, despite James Ehnes's touching performance, such a strong piece as *The Danube*, an impressive work (with Susanna Andersson singing the haunting vocalise in the third movement) which Janáček left unfinished.

The two Ballads, while no less original, are as enigmatic, fascinating in their use of expression through the eccentric instrumental textures which Janáček increasingly came to explore in his last years. *The Fiddler's Child*, based on one of those macabre tales which stalk through Central European folklore, may well have been motivated by the deaths of Janáček's own two children and is haunted by the sound of four-part violas, sometimes muted and blended with a bass clarinet. Leader Milina Mandozzi does well to show the way through this mysterious, powerful work. *The Ballad of Blaník*, based on another popular tale (also used by Smetana), the one about the hidden king who will one day rise from slumber to lead his people in their hour of need to victory over the tyrant, also draws on the combination of violas and clarinets but is in general more traditionally textured. These must be difficult works to prepare and indeed to record; both playing and recording are vividly managed. **John Warrack**

Mahler

Symphonies – No 7^a; No 8^b

^bAnna Lucia Richter, ^bAilish Tynan, ^bErin Wall
sops ^bAlice Coote, ^bCharlotte Hellekant mezs
^bNikolai Schukoff ten ^bMichael Nagy bar ^bAin
Anger bass ^bBoys of Limburg Cathedral Choir;
EuropaChorAkademie; Czech Philharmonic Choir
Brno; Frankfurt Radio Symphony Orchestra /
Paavo Järvi

Video director **Michael Ciniselli**

C Major Entertainment © ② DVD 729508;
⑥ 729604 (164' + 19' • NTSC • 16:9 • 1080i •
DTS-HD MA5.1, DTS5.1 & PCM stereo • O • s)
Recorded live at the *Kurhaus, Wiesbaden,
August 12, 2011; ^bKloster Eberbach, May 24 & 25,
2013. Bonus: Introductions to the Symphonies by
Paavo Järvi



In the interview accompanying the Eighth Symphony, Paavo Järvi confesses that its first part is 'not my favourite music' and, in truth, you can tell from his traffic-cop act from the opening. The line sags into

'Infirma nostri corporis' and is only superficially lifted by pointed, quasi-Baroque choral articulation. The great cry of 'Accende' (or 'Ak-Zende' – German Latin in Frankfurt) is just the preparation for the recapitulation, and the coda's stairways to heaven are emphatically metronomic.

Järvi is more convinced by Part Two, but I am not by his performance of it, or by his theory that Mahler's setting of Goethe is an expression of the composer's need 'to be loved for what he is'. He adopts an arm's-length approach to music that surely needs to be believed in if it isn't to sound like an inflated if efficiently strung-together compendium of late-Romantic clichés.

This is a shame because on a technical level the Eighth is – as with all the other performances in the cycle – highly accomplished. Less so the filming: the cameras offer either close-up or side-on views of the soloists, and they could have made more of Järvi's intelligent disposition of the two choirs either side of the organ console (the boys are placed in a side gallery to stage right) to illustrate Mahler's neo-Handelian choral counterpoint; instead, close attention is paid to a particular blonde soprano in the front row. Each part is allotted only one track, and the applause is not tracked to the film: the place erupts in cheers as the soloists walk off the platform, which can't be right.

The driving pulse to the Seventh's first movement is superficially similar to that of the Eighth, but Järvi is much more comfortable with this symphony's mutation of Baroque-shaped gestures into expressionist parodies of themselves: sarcasm over sincerity. Even the movement's central idyll presses on as if trying to catch up with Webern's Op 6 Pieces, and the *Scherzo* flashes by. Many of its extremes of dynamic and articulation are moderated in haste, though that impression may also be due to a compressed and spotlit sound mix from a hall in Wiesbaden that seems small for both the piece and the orchestra. Järvi even imparts a plausible urgency to the fourth-movement serenade by encouraging some tender phrasing outside a swift basic tempo, and the finale is a rococo riot which laughs in the face of good form and good taste. Overall the Seventh belongs with the other mid-period symphonies as the high point of the cycle. **Peter Quantrill**

Mendelssohn • Tchaikovsky

Mendelssohn Violin Concerto, Op 64

Tchaikovsky Violin Concerto, Op 35

Arabella Steinbacher *vn*

Suisse Romande Orchestra / Charles Dutoit

Pentatone © PTC5186 504 (68' • DDD/DSD)



The competition is fierce for these most frequently recorded of all violin concertos,

both individually and together. Most of us will have our personal favourites (Heifetz/Reiner for me in the Tchaikovsky – RCA, 12/57; Menuhin/Kurtz in the Mendelssohn – EMI, 3/59). Rival single-disc couplings are no less distinguished, not least Dutoit's own classic recording with Kyung Wha Chung (Decca, 12/82) as well as Stern/Ormandy (Sony Classical, 1/60) and Milstein/Abbado (DG, 12/73).

Arabella Steinbacher and Charles Dutoit make an empathetic partnership but don't reveal anything in either work that we don't know already. Steinbacher's sweet tone and collegial manner are positives but leave one wishing she could be more assertive at times, for example in the first movement of the Mendelssohn when the neatly drilled, chattering Suisse Romande woodwind occasionally obscure the focus of her solo line. Dutoit, a master accompanist, provides exceptional, alert support throughout. The recorded sound too is first class.

Yet if Steinbacher lacks the power and intensity of those cited above, one could hardly wish for a more expressive account of both concertos: catch, for instance, the little *tenutos* she inserts just before the coda in the finale of the Mendelssohn – highly affecting. Her approach to the Tchaikovsky is far from electrifying (Heifetz's first movement is over four minutes faster) – and it's fine to take a more relaxed view – but what does not work is to play the cadenza so ponderously, disembodied from what is, after all, an *allegro moderato* movement. Here, energy and tension falter.

If you already have fine recordings of these two indispensable works, then it is unlikely you will need this new one, for all its virtues. If you have neither, then for all its shortcomings I doubt you will be disappointed. The booklet-notes are informative but, by the end of the first paragraph, you know you are reading a literal translation by a non-musician. **Jeremy Nicholas**
► Arabella Steinbacher discusses Tchaikovsky's Violin Concerto in *The Musician* and the Score on page 44

Mendelssohn

Overtures – Calm Sea and Prosperous Voyage, Op 27^a; Ruy Blas, Op 95^b. Symphony No 5, 'Reformation', Op 107^a

London Symphony Orchestra /
Sir John Eliot Gardiner

LSO Live © ② (L + S) LSO0775

(47' • DDD/DSD • DTS-HD MA5.1 & LPCM stereo)

Recorded live at the Barbican, London, ^bMarch 23 and ^aOctober 2, 2014



Ruy Blas is something out of the ordinary, and not only because of its sleek lines and

uncommonly fast tempi but in one or two textural anomalies. Good *sforzandos* keep the drama level high but I was fascinated by what sounds like a single-note *tremolando* beginning of bar 5 on page 3 (Breitkopf score), at roughly 0'59", then some textural variants at around 1'09" that involve unfamiliar repetitions. I've never heard any of them before. Knowing Gardiner's penchant for alternative versions of Mendelssohn, could this be an original or an unpublished revision of *Ruy Blas*?

Calm Sea and Prosperous Voyage subscribes to a similar interpretative formula, clean, driven and transparent, the opening not as prayerful as Edward Gardner's Birmingham recording (Chandos, 4/15), but with some warmly blended woodwinds soon afterwards. The sea swell on strings at around 3'45" could have benefited from greater depth from below but the blustery excitement that sets in fully matches the impact of *Ruy Blas*.

The *Reformation* opens reverentially, with nicely tiered textures and gentle brass *crescendos*. The build towards *Allegro con fuoco* approximates a sense of occasion and the statements of the 'Dresden Amen' are beautifully played by the LSO strings. In the *Allegro* itself, which is doggedly emphatic, at least initially, Gardiner adds unmarked *crescendos*. Although the *Allegro vivace Scherzo* is well played, it flatly refuses to smile, until we reach the Trio, which just about manages a half-smile. Too swift for comfort, I would say. The close of the movement is matter-of-fact and those wondrous, wrap-around flute curlicues (tr 4, 4'15") go for nothing. The *Andante* drifts by without incident or offence and the transitional setting of *Ein' feste Burg* is forthright, the *Allegro vivace* that picks up the message appropriately forceful, the switch to *Allegro maestoso* witnessing a further burst of energy. I personally prefer a less disruptive transition tempo-wise but I'm fairly convinced that Gardiner's way was also Mendelssohn's way. It's a powerful reading, solidly argued, often exciting and vividly played though I'd ultimately opt for Zehetmair (MDG, 4/14) or, in the vintage stakes, Masur (Apex, 4/74), who is especially strong on Mendelssohn's tenderness and sense of awe. The Blu-ray disc refines what is already, on SACD, a generally excellent recording. **Rob Cowan**

Nielsen

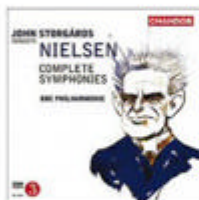
'Complete Symphonies'

Symphonies - No 1, Op 7; No 2, 'The Four Temperaments', Op 16; No 3, 'Sinfonia espansiva', Op 127^a; No 4, 'The Inextinguishable', Op 29; No 5, Op 50; No 6, 'Sinfonia semplice'

^aGillian Keith sop ^aMark Stone bar

BBC Philharmonic Orchestra / John Storgårds

Chandos (M) ③ CHAN10859 (3h 32' • DDD)



It adds something to journey through this amazing cycle of symphonies in

sequence and in relatively quick succession. The recent Oramo survey on BIS – though I heard it over a much longer period of time – is still very much in my mind and, given John Storgårds's markedly different approach, I thought it would be useful to start with a couple of general observations. Oramo's great strength is his dynamism, his ability to convey the *imperative* of Nielsen's symphonic writing. Storgårds seems always to want to allow the music to breathe. His readings remind me of the early Ole Schmidt cycle though with far more incisiveness and finish. Still, there are occasions here when one just wants him to urge the tempo up just a notch or two, to edge the accelerator and burn just a little more rubber.

What isn't in doubt is my preference for the Chandos sound, which, though spacious and far-reaching, feels more immediate and subsequently better clarified in the rowdiest *tuttis*. And there are a good few of those. The dynamic range is extraordinary, too, and while I would not want to denigrate the quality of the BIS product, I seem to be hearing more of what I want to hear with this new release.

So the 'espansiva' manner of Storgårds's approach begins long before the Third Symphony and starts as it means to go on with the First. It isn't slow but it is solid, even a little deliberate – bracing in a big-boned way. The slow movement is very beautiful, highlighting at once the superior quality of the BBC Philharmonic's playing, and there is a steadier, more organic sense of evolution about it. The opening of *The Four Temperaments* would be even more irresistible if the sweep of it were matched by a tad more impulsiveness in the outer movements. Still, it is exciting, with trombones weighing in impressively in the first-movement development and all due relish for Nielsen's snappy syncopations in the coda. The slow movement sounds almost Brucknerian – elementally expansive

– and I love the way Storgårds leans into the dense harmony at the climax.

The dramatic 'revving up' at the start of the *Espansiva* does not for me generate quite the requisite uplift; and as the music grows in momentum, hurtling towards Nielsen's gigantic carousel of a climax, Storgårds fails to capitalise on the euphoric release with its tumbling, descanting horns. It's partly tempo, it's partly spirit, but there is a joyous vulgarity – more *Schwung* – about a performance like Bernstein's with the Royal Danish in this music. Storgårds is just too staid and when he does offer a slightly rebellious gesture – the rhetorical *ritardando* on the trombones in the first-movement coda – it kind of puts the brakes on the music.

The star turns are undoubtedly the Fourth and Fifth symphonies. The seismic energy of *The Inextinguishable* is brilliantly conveyed in really taut playing from the BBC Philharmonic. Particularly effective is the dramatic *attacca* from the benign Baroque-like ambling of the second movement into the searing string-led slow movement. That scarifying fugue into the final is scorching, too, though again I can't help feeling that upping the tempo a fraction into the finale would have given the explosive duelling timpani more to build on.

I do like the way Storgårds illuminates the startling new sound world of the last two symphonies – the stark use of percussion and celesta, over-ripe bassoons and rampant clarinet. The bizarre oscillations at the start of the Fifth are full of disquiet, while the opposing elements of the piece – the renegade side drum and big 'blue beyond' theme (which always strikes me as so American) – are held in high relief. The anarchic climax of the first movement is astonishingly well engineered and the breakthrough moment of the 'blue beyond' theme is as thrilling as I've heard it – yet still topped by the desolate *ppp* clarinet solo's fade to black.

It's those eerily hushed moments that really register with Storgårds. There's a wonderful example in the grotesque 'nursery' of the Sixth's first movement, which comes on like an unsettling bedtime story. For me this piece has always resonated with Yeats's words 'the ceremony of innocence is drowned' and in that Storgårds probably takes a darker view than Oramo.

Ideally, of course, one would like a combination of Storgårds and Oramo, not to mention Blomstedt and others besides. Oramo scores for energy and impetus but Storgårds has Chandos for sound.

Edward Seckerson

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Pejačević

Overture, Op 49. Verwandlung, Op 37^a.
Liebeslied, Op 39^a. Zwei Schmetterlingslieder,
Op 52^a. Piano Concerto, Op 33^b

^aIngeborg Danz contr ^bOliver Triendl pf

Brandenburg State Orchestra, Frankfurt /

Howard Griffiths

CPO   CPO777 916-2 (50' • DDD)



No, I hadn't either.
And my guess is
that, unless aware
of CPO's five earlier

volumes of Dora Pejačević's music, few have. She was born in 1885 into one of Croatia's most distinguished aristocratic families and, despite studies with minor figures in Dresden and Munich, seems to have been a largely self-taught musician. Her most productive period was from 1913, the date of her G minor Piano Concerto (the first work of its kind by a Croatian), and 1920. Her 58 opus numbers include a symphony, chamber works, piano solos and songs, 106 titles in all. Having married in 1921, she died in 1923 following complications after the birth of her first child.

Quite why she has fallen off the map so completely is intriguing. Pejačević is no genius but, as can be heard on this sixth volume, more than merely accomplished, well able to hold her own in the company of other late-Romantic *fin de siècle* composers whose reputations are assured. Indeed, her setting of Karl Kraus's poem 'Verwandlung' ('Transformation'), the outstanding work on this disc, won praise from Arnold Schoenberg (with the reservation that 'naturally a woman cannot be a creator of music'). Ingeborg Danz sings this, 'Liebeslied' (a Rilke setting) and the two brief *Schmetterlingslieder* with moving simplicity.

Judging from her Piano Concerto, Pejačević must have been an extremely good pianist. It's a showy virtuoso vehicle in the traditional three movements: its dense orchestration put me in mind of Marx's *Romantic* Concerto at times, its rhetorical flourishes of Sgambati's own G minor Concerto at others. It's well worth hearing but ultimately lacking, I think, the originality and melodic appeal to win it a place alongside the best of its kind. It certainly keeps the excellent Oliver Triendl on his toes, so to speak, Howard Griffiths and the the Brandenburg State Orchestra offer the same degree of ardour and expressive lyricism as they bring to the vocal items.

Jeremy Nicholas

Ravel

Daphnis et Chlo  . La valse

Orchestra and ^aChorus of the Op  ra

National de Paris / Philippe Jordan

Erato   2564 61668-4 (69' • DDD)



Another month,
another complete
Daphnis et Chlo  . It
was only in May that

I warmly welcomed the recording by the Rotterdam Philharmonic under Yannick N  zet-S  guin on BIS. Here now is one by the Orchestra of the Op  ra National de Paris under Philippe Jordan. The difference in programming is that N  zet-S  guin couples his *Daphnis* with the *Pavane pour une infante d  funte*; Jordan chooses *La valse*.

The spirit of the dance inhabits both *Daphnis* interpretations. Jordan's was made in the wake of a series of stagings of the ballet at the Op  ra Bastille last year. N  zet-S  guin's did not have the same theatrical background but he nevertheless seemed to respond in an instinctively dramatic way to the ebbs and flows of the action. Maybe, too, his view of the score as a purely symphonic entity, rather than as one shaped by the dancers onstage, gives him the edge in putting the music on to CD: there is a more refined focus on colour than in Jordan's interpretation, and passages such as the 'Danse guerri  re' are more elemental in their force. But there is also much to commend in Jordan's version, not least the way in which he graces the rhythms and dynamics with natural, malleable inflection and crafts the textures with such care.

It always creates a conundrum when two creditable versions of the same work come out in quick succession, and here either of them would fit the bill. It is just that N  zet-S  guin's has the more compelling presence. **Geoffrey Norris**

Selected comparison:

Rotterdam PO, N  zet-S  guin (5/15) (BIS) BIS1850

Rode

Violin Concertos – No 1, Op 3;

No 5, Op 7; No 9, Op 17

Friedemann Eichhorn vn

Jena Philharmonic Orchestra / Nicol  s Pasquet

Naxos   8 572755 (76' • DDD)



This, the third
volume of Friedemann
Eichhorn's traversal of
the violin concertos of

Pierre Rode, takes in his heyday in Paris and his sojourn in Russia between 1804 and

1808. All three works testify to his reputation as a supremely brilliant and elegant player.

His First Concerto is firmly in the tradition of Viotti, his mentor, in its bold, impassioned minor-key manner. Eichhorn relishes the virtuosity of the writing, as well as the delicacy of some of the passagework and the classical poise of the more lyrical moments. But there are some unconvincing tempo changes: in the first movement, a passage in triplets suddenly pushes forwards, while in the Polonaise finale a sprightly initial speed has to slow down to accommodate very fast passages. Surely it would be better to find a more poised tempo that would still be lively but plausible for the brilliant passagework.

The Fifth Concerto is a subtler, more individual work, with memorable writing for woodwind. The second movement, a minor-key Siciliano, and the following 'Rondo   la russe' are especially attractive. The Ninth Concerto is perhaps less striking, although the way Rode, in the wake of Mozart, blends forceful and lyrical characters in the first movement is most effective, and the highly ornamented Cavatina gives a splendid idea of Rode's expressive style as a player. Eichhorn plays this, and the *cantabile* music generally, very lightly; I'd have welcomed a more soulful, emotional approach. But, all in all, the issue makes us well aware of Rode's gifts as a composer. **Duncan Druce**

Schubert

Symphony No 9, D944

Orchestra Mozart / Claudio Abbado

DG   479 4652GH;     479 5087GH2 (63' • DDD)

Recorded live at the Auditorium Manzoni, Bologna, September 19-23, 2011, and the Bolzano Auditorium, September 24-25, 2011



There was a time
when Schubert's
Great C major

Symphony seemed an interpretatively elusive work, which explains why such store was set by memorable recorded accounts by Furtw  ngler, Krips, Boult and B  hm. And by Toscanini, when his 1941 Philadelphia performance resurfaced in the late 1950s. Since there are things in the symphony which can be traced directly back to Schubert's Overture 'In the Italian Style', D590, an Italianate take on the work has never been without interest.

Abbado's first recording, made with the Chamber Orchestra of Europe in Vienna in 1987, stood within that Italianate tradition, and very fine it is, though Abbado's endorsement of some over-zealous research into the autograph

manuscript led to a couple of curious interventions. I rather enjoyed the euphonic belch, worthy of Sir Toby himself, which Schumann deleted from the *Scherzo* when he originally unearthed the symphony. But the altered version of the motif which brings major-key pathos to the minor-key march at bar 25 of the slow movement was an intervention too far.

Neither occurs in this new recording, which derives from a series of performances Abbado gave with his Orchestra Mozart in different halls in Bolzano and Bologna in September 2011. Since the results, technically speaking, are perfectly plausible, it's clear that this daring raid on Abbado's posthumous archive is well within the competence of DG's editors and engineers.

No one is likely to mistake the Orchestra Mozart for a slimmed-down Berlin Philharmonic, as was the case with the Chamber Orchestra of Europe, but the Orchestra Mozart's homelier, less virtuoso approach is apt to Abbado's later way with the music. It's a reading that is mellower, though with no loss of textural transparency, and more measured, though with no loss of cogency and drive. As before, Abbado takes all the repeats.

If the results are not as purely electrifying in the quicker movements as in the 1987 version, in the slow movement the newer performance has the edge. Not only is the text to be preferred but the performance itself is deeper and more serene. 'Like a bell haunted by a human soul' is how Tovey describes the horn's ushering in the return of the minor key after the movement's consolatory second subject. And so it is here. This, then, is a version which complements rather than yields to or replaces Abbado's earlier recording. Admirers of the conductor – and the symphony – will want both.

Richard Osborne

Selected comparison:

COE, Abbado (2/89) (DG) 423 656-2GH

Shostakovich

Violin Concerto No 1, Op 99^a.

Symphony No 9, Op 70^b

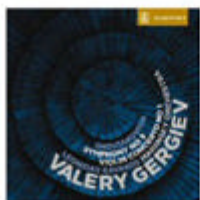
^aLeonidas Kavakos *vn*

Mariinsky Orchestra / Valery Gergiev

Mariinsky © MAR0524 (64' • DDD/DSD)

Recorded live at the Concert Hall of the Mariinsky Theatre, St Petersburg, ^aJune 17 & 18, 2011,

^bJune 16 & 18, 2012



After the epic outrage and defiance of the 'war' symphonies, Nos 7 and 8,

Shostakovich's Ninth seemed deliberately designed to confound expectations – not just those relating to ninth symphonies (a myth which needed exploding) but the whole question of what a major composer like this should be writing at the end of the bloodiest conflict the world had ever seen. Circus music? Polkas? Something on a smaller – you might even say neo-classical – scale? Gergiev makes much of the Haydn-esque deftness of the outer movements here – and where the music does hint at tragedy or merely the plaintively regretful (the gently ebbing second-movement *Moderato*), he is mindful of the irony that may be just a beat away.

Gergiev, for instance, makes much of the portentous trombone declamation that brings on a funeral eulogy from (of all instruments) the solo bassoon in what turns out to be a precipitately truncated *Largo*. That is delivered over a desolate drone in the strings – but the real kicker is that the joker in the woodwind pack cannot suppress its natural tendencies and turns his eulogy into another inane polka. Better yet, and more shocking, is the arrival of the Red Army Band in the coda of the finale, transforming the polka into a goose-stepping march. Gergiev gives that a weighty and sinister pomp. Shostakovich's scepticism could hardly be writ larger.

The Violin Concerto is, by contrast, worlds apart: music of the night, songs and dances of death. Leonidas Kavakos plays it with controlled intensity, restrained and beautiful in the quietudes of the first movement – a cool, glacial quality which might at any moment evaporate into the ether but for the death knell of the tam-tam bringing us back to grim reality. As a reading it doesn't have the all-out unbridled passion of a Maxim Vengerov – the *Scherzo* is less strenuous, less fraught with desperation (the interplay with orchestral winds is almost Baroque-like in its keenness) and the great Passacaglia, announced here with grittily determined timpani and horns, nobly invokes Bach, the emotion contained, the eternal spinning of the countersubject possessed of a more 'intellectual' rigour. Likewise I don't get the unravelling of reason in the transitional cadenza – its absolute control precludes the sense of imminent self-destruction. But that is Kavakos's way; and while you might not share it you cannot help but be drawn in by it. **Edward Seckerson**

Sibelius

Lemminkäinen Legends, Op 22.

Pohjola's Daughter, Op 49

Finnish Radio Symphony Orchestra / Hannu Lintu
Ondine © ODE1262-5 (62' • DDD/DSD)



Competition is pretty intense as far as the *Lemminkäinen Suite* is concerned, not least

from Ondine's own Leif Segerstam (7/96) and Mikko Franck (8/00). The first thing to say is that Hannu Lintu obtains a satisfyingly dapper response from his Finnish Radio band. Textures are sifted with skill, chosen tempi are unfailingly judicious and Lintu shows a canny awareness of the bigger scheme. I appreciate the snap and thrust he brings to 'Lemminkäinen and the Maidens on the Island' (the crisp accenting in the winds and strings throughout will make you sit up), and in 'The Swan of Tuonela' he draws some agreeably luminous and breathtakingly hushed sounds from his string choir (try from around 3'10" to hear how adeptly Lintu exploits a daringly wide range of dynamic). 'Lemminkäinen in Tuonela', too, boasts impressive control and no want of menace, though a little more giddy abandon in 'Lemminkäinen's Return' would not have gone amiss.

Ultimately, for all its sterling qualities, there's no getting away from an ever-so-slight element of reserve about Lintu's intelligent conception that will not be to all tastes; the outstandingly perceptive Segerstam, certainly, brings rather greater heart, story-telling flair and sheer temperament to bear, while Franck's recreative spark, youthful zeal and audacious sense of adventure never fail to activate the goosebumps. It would also be remiss of me not to mention the enduring claims of Ormandy on Warner Classics (those intoxicatingly sensuous Philadelphia strings in the glorious opening tableau especially remain unsurpassed), Jensen (Australian Eloquence), Kamu (DG), Sakari (Naxos) and Vänskä's recent outing with the Lahti SO on BIS (consistently involving, sparky and grippingly dark-hued).

As a coupling Lintu gives us *Pohjola's Daughter*. Again, the performance is a meticulously prepared, trim and keenly observant one, without quite etching itself into the memory as indelibly as do those distinguished predecessors under, say, Koussevitzky, Toscanini, Boult, Barbirolli, Bernstein and Davis (in Boston). The Ondine engineers provide satisfyingly ample, commendably lifelike sound. Is it all enough, I wonder? **Andrew Achenbach**

Stravinsky · Bartók

Bartók The Miraculous Mandarin – Suite^a
Stravinsky The Rite of Spring^b

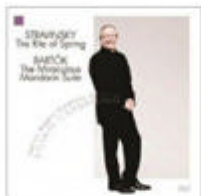


Rosanne Philippens recording Stravinsky and Szymanowski with the National Youth Orchestra of the Netherlands and Xian Zhang for their new disc on Channel Classics

**Yomiuri Nippon Symphony Orchestra /
Sylvain Cambreling**

Altus Ⓢ ALT307 (00' • DDD)

Recorded live at the ^bMetropolitan Theatre,
Tokyo, September 8, 2013; ^aSuntory Hall,
Tokyo, December 10, 2013



There are good things here and Altus has achieved a decent match between two separate acoustics: the Tokyo Metropolitan Theatre for *The Rite of Spring* and Suntory Hall for *The Miraculous Mandarin*. Note how the bass clarinet presents itself in *The Rite*'s introduction, and the clarity of the gathering woodwind minions later on. Come 'The Augurs of Spring' and the approach shifts to proficient autopilot, or seems to, although as before textures are extremely uncluttered. Big drums in 'The Ritual of Abduction' have impact, the 'Procession of the Sage' builds well and the 'Dance of the Earth' is especially exciting. What the First Part lacks is the sort of animal drive that characterises Peter Eötvös (Junge Deutsche Philharmonie), Igor Markevitch (stereo Philharmonia recording) and Antál Dorati (stereo

Minneapolis recording). The woodwinds again excel at the start of 'The Sacrifice', though I'd have liked rather more in the way of tonal substance from the strings. There's good pacing and some effectively held clarinet tone in the 'Evocation of the Ancestors', while the closing 'Sacrificial Dance' is taut and propulsive.

The Miraculous Mandarin's opening cityscape lacks menace (there's no organ), the 'Decoy Games', although well played, aren't insinuating enough and the final chase keeps the adrenaline flow at a fairly low ebb. It's a good performance, with some oily *glissandos* where needed and, like *The Rite*, enjoys textural transparency. But although there are moments where the tension mounts (the Mandarin's first appearance, for example), much of the performance lacks the right sort of intensity. Anaemic would perhaps be too harsh a judgement but it at least gives you a clue as to where I'm coming from. Sylvain Cambreling is an intelligent conductor who has the music securely in his grasp and the Yomiuri Nippon Symphony Orchestra is a well-groomed ensemble but both works cry out for extra drive, character and, in the case of the Bartók, the sort of deep-vein involvement you get from Fischer and the Budapest Festival Orchestra in the

complete 'pantomime' or from Dorati and the Chicago Symphony in the Suite (mono – but a real performance). This coupling is enjoyable but no more than that. **Rob Cowan**

Stravinsky – selected comparisons:

Philb Orch, Markevitch (6/97) (TEST) SBT1076

Minneapolis SO, Dorati (3/94) (MERC) 434 331-2MM

Junge Deutsche Philb, Eötvös (9/06) (BMC) BMC118

Bartók – selected comparisons:

Chicago SO, Dorati (2/55⁸) (MERC) Ⓢ 475 6862MM4

Budapest Fest Orch, I Fischer

(8/97) (PHIL) Ⓢ 454 430-2PH or 475 7684PH3

Szymanowski • Stravinsky

Stravinsky *Chanson russe*^a. The Firebird^a – Berceuse; Scherzo **Szymanowski** Violin Concerto No 1, Op 35^b. King Roger – Chant de Roxane^a. Myths, Op 30^a. Nocturne and Tarantella, Op 28^a

Rosanne Philippens *vn* ^a**Julien Quentin** *pf*

^b**National Youth Orchestra of the Netherlands /**

Xian Zhang

Channel Classics Ⓢ CCSSA36715

(71' • DDD/DSO)



The Netherlands-based violinist Rosanne Philippens is a significant young

talent whose varied tonal palette especially suits Szymanowski's music, though in that respect she faces formidable competition, CD-wise, from the likes of Skride, Zehetmair, Danczowska, Zimmermann, Steinbacher and Tetzlaff. The formula needed for this particular concerto includes tonal translucency and technical agility, that and an ability to dart in and around the work's multi-layered orchestral textures. Philippens connects well with Szymanowski's sensual muse, though the National Youth Orchestra of the Netherlands under Xian Zhang, while impressively proficient, don't achieve the level of pointillist precision that, say, Rattle in Birmingham does for Zehetmair, Wit in Warsaw for Zimmermann or Janowski in Berlin for Steinbacher. All score higher in the glitter department, which in this of all works matters. Philippens likes her expressive *portamentos* and has plenty of wrist power in reserve for the more demanding passages. Couplings will as ever be of the essence.

Skride, Zehetmair, Danczowska and Zimmermann all usefully add the Second Concerto (Zimmermann providing a further bonus in Britten's marvellous Violin Concerto), whereas Philippens offers various Szymanowski pieces for violin and piano with Julien Quentin, plus a brief Stravinsky sequence, the winsome 'Chanson russe' (ie Pasha's aria from *Mavra*) being especially attractive. The Szymanowski works face a significant digital rival in the more comprehensive Hyperion collection of the 'complete music for violin and piano' featuring Alina Ibragimova with pianist Cédric Tiberghien (though Ibragimova passes on the transcription of 'Roxana's Song' from *King Roger*, which Philippens includes). Comparing the two at the start of 'La fontaine d'Aréthuse', the most famous of the three *Myths*, is enough to establish Ibragimova's sense of atmosphere, the way she connects with Tiberghien, and their shared sense of tonal colour. The entrancing *Nocturne and Tarantella* proves likewise, Ibragimova's fine-tipped Nocturne quite in a class of its own. Summing up, I'd opt for Ibragimova and Tiberghien in the duo pieces and either Zimmermann or Zehetmair in the Concerto. However, Philippens is certainly good enough to please those who fancy this particular programme. **Rob Cowan**

Vn Conc – selected comparisons:

Zehetmair, CBSO, Rattle (8/96) (EMI) 514576-2

FP Zimmermann, Warsaw PO, Wit

(4/09) (SONY) 88697 43999-2

Szymanowski Wks for Vn & Pf – selected comparison:

Ibragimova, Tiberghien (7/09) (HYPE) CDA67703

'The Tchaikovsky Album'

Capriccio italien, Op 45. Fantasy-Overtures – 'Francesca da Rimini', Op 32; 'Romeo and Juliet'. Overture, '1812', Op 49

Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra /

Vasily Petrenko

Decca/Classic FM © CFMD38 (72' • DDD)



Something of a Tchaikovsky hit-parade here (hence the title and Classic FM connection) but nothing run-of-the-mill about the performers. The strident trumpet fanfares announcing *Capriccio italien* are an auspicious start and Petrenko's darkly saturated Royal Liverpool Philharmonic strings pull us in, the final bars of the soulful first theme driven home with real trenchancy. You can hear straight away what fine sound the engineers have achieved in Liverpool's Philharmonic Hall. For the rest of this opening showpiece, Petrenko – the tourist from St Petersburg – clearly knows a good Italian street party when he comes across one. Bags of colour, sparkling work from the RLPO trumpets and a heady sprint through the final pages, which certainly does the business.

Romeo and Juliet is more subdued, very much in the 'classical' vein, with subtle instrumental blends and wonderful attention to dynamics. Petrenko achieves a truly breathtaking hush of disquiet at the lead in to the first agitated *allegro* and the love theme arrives on gossamer strings swelling to its final blossoming without overworking the *rubato*. I've heard more exciting accounts but few as sensitive.

Much the same might be said of *Francesca da Rimini* where the winds of Dante's inferno hardly blast as intensely as they do in the famous Stokowski recording – or indeed the highly emotive account (still my favourite) from Bernstein and the Israel Philharmonic. Tchaikovsky's innate classicism again takes precedence over a more explicit 'pictorial' romanticism, with the balletic allusions beautifully pointed in the central love scene with its delectable woodwind colorations. The climax wrought from that limpid clarinet theme is a splendid thing.

And so to the year 1812, which delivers the martial goods with vigour. Urgency is the key here, with Petrenko adopting a super-propulsive tempo for the main *allegro* section – very exciting – and no sense of lost momentum in the lyric interludes. The final assault brings a telling assortment of bells and a suitably ground-shaking cannonade. Definitely an IMAX experience. **Edward Seckerson**

Telemann

'Totally Telemann – Music for Orchestra'

Concertos – TWV51/B1; TWV51/c1; TWV52/e1; TWV52/e3. Suite, 'La bourse', TWV55/B11

Barokkanerne

LAWO Classics © LWV1074 (67' • DDD)

Telemann

'Ouverture & Concerti pour Darmstadt'

Concertos – TWV51/a1; TWV51/D1; TWV51/D2; TWV52/e3. Ouverture, TWV55/F3

Les Ambassadeurs / Alexis Kossenko fl

Alpha © ALPHA200 (70' • DDD)



Two discs of Telemann concertos and overture-suites, both by ensembles of similar size, even with a work in common (an achievement when you consider just how much Telemann there is to choose from). How to distinguish between them?

Well, actually it's not so difficult. Barokkanerne, a Norwegian group with a strong line in guest directors, offer four concertos and the overture-suite celebrating the Frankfurt stock exchange in whose swanky building Telemann had his apartment. The suite's enigmatic movement headings ('Le repos interrompu', 'La solitude associée', etc) have had programme-note-writers groping for unconvincing explanations for years (reader, I was one), only to be exposed by the discovery that the overall title of 'La bourse' came from a 20th-century publisher. Ah well, whatever it is about, Barokkanerne do not characterise it that much here, and it is instead in the four concertos that they are at their best. Alfredo Bernardini breezes by to lead a lusty oboe concerto with customarily fluid ease (the piece starts on an alarming dissonance, by the way); Kati Debretzeni reveals a natural security and musicality in a violin concerto with a lovely slow movement; and she and Torun Kirby Torbo show plenty of suave expressive detail in a concerto for flute and violin with another terrifically touching *Adagio*. Kirby Torbo later teams up with Ingeborg Christophersen in the evergreen Concerto for flute and recorder, liquidly played and as exhilarating in its 'Polish' finale as ever.

French group Les Ambassadeurs are more outgoing, with a bigger sound right from when two horns blast their way into the hunt-obsessed Overture in F and pretty much refuse to go away, even when the rest of the orchestra is dancing a sarabande. Happily their boisterous



Yuja Wang, who joins the San Francisco Symphony Orchestra and Michael Tilson Thomas in Littloff's *Scherzo* on their new disc of miniatures

company is respectful (if a tad tipsy), until they bring things to end with a clamorous 'Fanfare' based on the horn-call signifying the kill. Jean-François and Pierre-Yves Madeuf, playing fully natural horns, bring a joyously loose-lipped and fruitily tuned flavour to it all. Elsewhere there is another violin concerto, this time with an opening *Adagio* that seems borrowed from some tragic opera scene. Zefira Valova is a spindly soloist compared to Debretzeni, and is recorded a touch too closely for my liking, but her flat-coloured sound does contribute something to the lachrymose quality of this unusual movement. She is nimble, however, in the flute and violin concerto, in which that extraordinary *Adagio* has a stiller quality than that of the Norwegians, though maybe that is another way of saying they do less with it. Director Alexis Kossenko is the soloist in two D major flute concertos, wanting more grace in the oom-cha first movement of D1, but in D2 establishing a proud polonaise rhythm in the first movement, tumbling and trickling deliciously through the *Largo* and leading a rustic reel in the finale. This is great stuff; but when all is said and done it is that horn-fuelled Overture, guaranteed to raise a smile, that remains the star of this release. **Lindsay Kemp**

'Masterpieces in Miniature'

Debussy *La plus que lente* **Delibes** *Sylvia* – *Cortège de Bacchus* **Delius** *On hearing the first cuckoo in spring* **Dvořák** *Legend*, Op 59 No 6 **Fauré** *Pavane*, Op 50 **Grieg** *The Last Spring*, Op 34 No 2 **Ives** *A Concord Symphony* (orch Brant) – The Alcotts **Litloff** *Concerto symphonique No 4*, Op 102 – *Scherzo*^a **Mahler** *Blumine* **Rachmaninov** *Vocalise*, Op 34 No 14 **Schubert** *Rosamunde*, D797 – *Entr'acte* No 3 **Sibelius** *Valse triste*, Op 44 No 1

^aYuja Wang *pf*

San Francisco Symphony Orchestra /

Michael Tilson Thomas

SFS Media © SFS0060 (78' • DDDDSD)



Tilson Thomas in an introduction to this 12-item miscellany. 'Playing them is now nearly a lost art.' I wonder whether that is entirely true, when the programme includes such core numbers as Fauré's *Pavane*, Rachmaninov's *Vocalise*, Sibelius's *Valse triste* and Delius's *On hearing the first cuckoo in spring*. Nor are

Mahler's *Blumine* or the entr'acte from Schubert's *Rosamunde* exactly uncommon, though the languorous, mannered way in which Tilson Thomas conducts the latter certainly lends it a novel profile. A tiny motivic similarity between the *Rosamunde* music and the start of 'The Alcotts' from Charles Ives's *A Concord Symphony* neatly establishes a link to one of the less familiar choices here, and it is fun to have Delibes's 'Cortège de Bacchus' from his ballet *Sylvia* as a final item, a deliciously Frenchified foretaste of Elgar in pomp-and-circumstance mode.

Back in 2000 Mariss Jansons and the Oslo Philharmonic released an EMI disc of 'World Encores' (alas nla) that also included *Valse triste* but was in general upbeat. Tilson Thomas has homed in more on the reflective repertoire, though he does begin with the *Scherzo* from Litloff's *Concerto symphonique* No 4, glitteringly played by Yuja Wang. Here, however, Tilson Thomas is perhaps closer to the mark about the lost art of performing such pieces, for you only have to recall Cherkassky, Curzon, Katin or Moura Lympany to remember the artless wit and sparkle that such music can radiate. **Geoffrey Norris**

Tchaikovsky's Violin Concerto

Arabella Steinbacher joins Ariane Todes to discuss the intricacies of this fiendish piece

Arabella Steinbacher is getting excited by the score of Tchaikovsky's Violin Concerto that I've brought with me – but it's the wrong one. It's the edition by Leopold Auer, and she's working out how it's different from her own copy. Auer famously refused to perform the work, which was initially dedicated to him, because it was too difficult. This led to a falling out with the composer, and, according to Tchaikovsky in his letters, 'had the effect of casting this unfortunate child of my imagination into the limbo of the hopelessly forgotten'.

Tchaikovsky rededicated the work to Adolph Brodsky, who premiered it. Auer eventually recanted and made extensive changes to the work in order to be able to play it, and taught it to his venerable students (including Heifetz, Elman, Zimbalist and Seidel). Today we're used to prodigy and superstar alike trotting the work out and think nothing of its technical challenges.

Various players, including Heifetz and Kreisler, have since made their own tweaks, but Steinbacher now plays Tchaikovsky's original version, without cuts, in the David Oistrakh edition: 'I was used to playing it with the cuts and nobody said anything, but when I performed it with the conductor Yakov Kreizberg he made me promise to play it without.' As well as changing some of the notes themselves (and not always to make them easier), Auer took out some of the repeated phrases. 'But,' says Steinbacher, 'these repeats make sense. Tchaikovsky wasn't such a bad composer that he didn't know what he was doing.'

Steinbacher has been playing the work since she was 15 and makes light work of the technical challenges, but she feels that it too often gets misrepresented as a virtuoso vehicle: 'For the public it's a very exciting piece and it can be played like a showpiece, but I'm sure Tchaikovsky didn't mean to create a showpiece. There are so many delicate moments you can bring out. It's a pity when you just play over them.'

This thinking is borne out on her new CD by her approach to the opening cadenza, with its notably leisurely pace, lingering over the long, arching phrase. 'The orchestra gives me its hand so I can continue this line and bring out the melody,' explains Steinbacher. 'Charles Dutoit tried to make the orchestra not slow down too much. They're coming to me and I just take that over and start my theme. It's like a cadenza, so I can take my time and feel free. It's a beautiful



'More than a showpiece': Steinbacher has been playing the concerto since she was 15

moment when the orchestra comes back in with the soft string sound and the *pizzicato*.'

The sense of space she gives to the main theme allows her to characterise it as she sees fit: 'You can see so much of the influence of Tchaikovsky's ballet music, especially in the first movement. Quite often it's played in a virtuoso way, and it *is* virtuoso; but when the theme starts properly, all the figures are so balletic – it's like dancers making pirouettes.'

One of the challenges when bringing out the music of the work is the stratospheric writing, which takes the player right up to the top of the violin, a difficult part to make sing: 'It's important not to get too scratchy for the sensitive character of the piece. When you have these high bits the orchestra is loud, so you have to play *fortissimo*. The challenge is not to press too much, because the sound can get ugly.'

The main cadenza divides the first movement, and after that the key changes and the writing becomes harder. 'The key is more brilliant, but everything becomes more exhausting for the hands, because you have more difficult runs, they're higher, and you're getting to the end of the movement. You're getting tired, but you have to keep up your strength.'



The historical view

Eduard Hanslick

Neue freie Presse, December 5, 1881

'For a while it proceeds soberly, musically, and not mindlessly, but soon vulgarity gains the upper hand and dominates until the end of the first movement.

The violin is no longer played: it is tugged about, torn, beaten black and blue.'

Leopold Auer

Letter to Musical Courier, NY, January 12, 1912

'My delay in bringing the concerto before the public was partly due to [the] doubt in my mind as to its intrinsic worth, and partly that I found it would be necessary, for purely technical reasons, to make some slight alterations in the passages of the solo part.'

Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky

Letter to Nadezhda von Meck, March 1878

'On this occasion I could not overcome my desire to make rough sketches for a concerto, and afterwards became so carried away that I abandoned work on the [Piano Sonata in G, Op 37].'

Steinbacher explains that the second movement represents some of the emotional turmoil Tchaikovsky was feeling when he wrote the work in 1878, having just come out of a disastrous and short-lived marriage to Antonina Milyukova: 'When he wrote it, he was in depression, going to a resort on Lake Geneva to recover. It's not a depressing piece, though: the only movement that has melancholy moments is the second, so maybe he felt quite free after he got divorced. He writes in his letters that he wanted to express his longings and that it was healing for him to write this piece. The concerto was like medicine for him.'

The second movement also benefits from Steinbacher's pared-back approach: 'I try to keep it simple rather than getting too emotional. It *is* emotional, but it's not such an intense melody. It's more like a song. It's like you're walking by a lake, thinking about something in the past – melancholic but not terribly sad. The most beautiful moment is when the theme comes back and the clarinet comes in. Every time I play it with Dutoit, he tries to make the clarinet improvisatory, as if it's pirouetting. It's also important to get very quiet, all the way to *pianissimo*.'

'The orchestra has to stay stable – like the ground underneath a drunk person trying to walk in a straight line' – Arabella Steinbacher

One challenge here is the repetition of the lush main subject: 'The theme comes back so many times, so in the beginning I try to keep it more in the shade, not too outgoing. Then, when Tchaikovsky writes *con anima*, it's like the sunshine comes through the clouds. It's on the E string and this positive energy comes through.' Again, there is an improvisatory feel to the writing, especially towards the end, with the final return of the theme: 'I play an improvisation around the orchestral theme. I'm playing around them and they have the long melodic lines.'

How does she approach the thrill ride of the last movement? 'Musically it's not that difficult. It's very motoric and energetic. It's very straight and the tempo has to be strict, so it's nice to bring out the contrasts with regard to dynamics, and you can do a lot with all the *decrescendos* and *crescendos*. It becomes more exciting if you bring out as much of that as you can.'

Apart from the manic runs of the last movement, there are also some lovely Russian folk-like interludes: 'When we come to the *molto meno mosso* we have a Russian theme, which sounds to me like a drunk trying to walk in a straight line. You can really play around with the tempo here. The orchestra has to stay stable, though – it's like the ground underneath this drunk person. Then comes tempo one again, with lots of down-bows, which is a funny Russian dance.'

In some performances, the last movement feels like a mad-panic frenzy of crashing notes; so what does it feel like to be at the centre of this storm? 'There is a lot of adrenaline. You have to keep your nerve. You play even faster because you know it's coming to the end. Then there's the finale, where my double-stops alternate with the orchestra and timpani. Here the orchestra usually gets very loud, and conductors try to pull the players back a little from that dynamic. It's a very exciting ending, and such fun.'

► For the review of Steinbacher's Tchaikovsky, see page 36. Steinbacher appears in the next EFG Gramophone Conversation at Foyles on June 22; visit foyles.co.uk



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Jeremy Nicholas on piano quartets by a mystery Danish composer:

'Can you name a one-eyed composer? Who, besides Berg, wrote an opera called Lulu?' ► REVIEW ON PAGE 50



Harriet Smith welcomes the Kuijkens' new Schubert Quintet:

'The resignation of the coda is beautifully judged, with the individual instruments held in perfect balance.' ► REVIEW ON PAGE 54

JS Bach

Sonatas for Violin and Harpsichord, BWV1014-1019

Lucy Russell *vn* John Butt *hpd*
Linn ® ② CKD433 (85' • DDD)



Linn's fast-building accumulation of core Baroque repertory continues here with

the sonatas for violin and obligato harpsichord, six wondrous works which never stop giving. The label's leading Bach man, John Butt, joins Lucy Russell, leader of the Fitzwilliam Quartet and a sometime leader of several British Baroque ensembles, in performances that may appear at first to be unassuming in the light of the big names who have already recorded these pieces, but actually have much to offer that is refreshing.

Russell says in the booklet that she wants to find 'Bach the Man...to abandon reverence, to explore "colour", and to burrow deeply into the emotional nature of the music as well as to find and highlight Bach's good humour and quirkiness'. These are words that could ring alarm bells for those to whom it suggests gratuitous over-interpretation, but in fact Russell and Butt's readings are neither intrusively gimmicky nor cloyingly romantic. Russell does not attempt to seduce the listener by hiding the 'Baroque' nature of her violin, which is slightly wiry, even acid on occasion, but also clear, in tune (not all her rivals have been!) and always alive. What pleases above all is the forthright naturalness of her playing, never mannered but still in its way searchingly expressive. Constantly it is the balance between different interpretative elements that impresses. She is not afraid of a long line; the first movement of No 4 flows swiftly; and in movements such as the openers of Nos 1 and 5, prominent but gentle *rubato* brings a smoothly loving feel to the one and a rich brooding quality to the other. And while some of the faster movements are rather frenetic, there is joy

in the chipper second of No 4, and the violin dances over the harpsichord with delicious variety of step in the finale of No 6. Butt's playing provides alert, clearly articulated and muscular support, though sometimes his harpsichord is a touch big in the balance. These are immensely likable performances, and a mission accomplished, I would suggest, for Russell. **Lindsay Kemp**

Boccherini

Six Terzettini, Op 47 G107-112

La Real Cámara

Glossa ® GCD920313 (63' • DDD)



The *Sei Terzettini* were written over a period of about a year from 1793, 25 years after

Boccherini arrived in Spain, and return to a combination – violin, viola and cello – that the composer had not used since he first arrived in 1768. These are more mature chamber works than those better-known examples from his salad days: here his style becomes more perceptibly Rococo and concerned with simplicity of expression and condensation of ideas. This is not easy for Boccherini, as an inveterate tunesmith, to exercise, but that he does so with such success in these pieces is testament to his seriousness as a composer.

It is clear that La Real Cámara appreciate all this of Boccherini, and they are particularly good at expounding the conversational aspects of his chamber music that are so unique to his own style. Their sound is not always the most beautiful, which is absolutely not to say that it does not bring out the wistfulness in these pieces, but there is a tentativeness behind the phrasing that prevents the sound from developing into the warmth that is usually Boccherini's greatest advocate. The performances are noticeably lacking in the grace of the flighty lines that is promised by the clear tone that appears with such promise at the start. There is not always an entirely corporate agreement on

tuning, either, which combines with a lack of variety in the restatements of repeated material to fail to do justice to Boccherini's particular form of simplicity and relaxed melody. **Caroline Gill**

Boulez • Tamminga/Bosgraaf

Boulez Dialogue de l'ombre double

Tamminga/Bosgraaf Dialogues

Erik Bosgraaf *recs* Jorrit Tamminga *elec*s

Brilliant ® 94842 (67' • DDD)



As Jorrit Tamminga amusingly recounts in his booklet-note, it was a chance

encounter with Boulez that led to his musical partner Erik Bosgraaf making this transcription of *Dialogue de l'ombre double* – though not the most ambitious, surely the most enticing of Boulez's forays into combining instruments with electronics. Some readers may recall Pascal Gallois's expert realisation of this piece for bassoon (Stradivarius, 4/03), but Bosgraaf's version seems altogether more authentic in its eliding the tonal properties of a melody instrument with that of the human voice which provided initial inspiration. Moreover, balance between recorders (Bosgraaf plays alto, soprano and sopranino instruments) and electronics is ideally judged, giving this music an immediacy yet also intimacy beyond that of any other recorded option.

The greater part of this disc is otherwise devoted to the *Dialogues* that has resulted from the duo's 'comprovisations' (though in its elaboration upon salient motifs, extemporisation might be thought equally applicable). The ways in which the seven pieces 'bleed' into each other proves absorbing, as does Tamminga's virtuoso manipulation of spatial ambience as an expressive backdrop within which Bosgraaf's playing is constantly redefined. If, in the final analysis, this is music needing to be experienced in real-time



Hope, Han, Finckel and Neubauer performing as part of the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center at Alice Tully Hall

(though headphones provide a plausible alternative), hearing it through the remove of speakers does not render the result much less arresting or evocative. That in itself says much for the excellence of the sound as recorded here, setting the seal on a successful artistic venture and a most worthwhile release. **Richard Whitehouse**

Brahms

Two Clarinet Sonatas, Op 120^a.

Six Piano Pieces, Op 118

^a**Lorenzo Coppola** cl **Andreas Staier** pf

Harmonia Mundi © HMC90 2187 (62' • DDD)



'Placid and melodious' is how *The Record Guide* (1951/55) described these

clarinet sonatas, the verdict of placidity contradicted by many performances on modern clarinets and pianos beginning perhaps with Frederick Thurston's 1937 recording of No 2. In 1990 Keith Puddy and Malcolm Martineau bucked the trend by offering them on instruments of Brahms's day, Puddy playing Richard Mühlfeld's own B flat clarinet – closely pitched to A=440, designed by Carl Bärmann and built by Georg Ottensteiner – Martineau an 1881 Bechstein. Lorenzo Coppola plays a Schwenk & Seggelke copy of a similar clarinet, Andreas Staier an 1875 American Steinway.

Neither Coppola nor Puddy makes any claims to imitation of Mühlfeld's style.

And common instrument notwithstanding, their differences in tone are probably due to choice of reed or even individual physiognomy. Coppola, however, draws attention to Brahms's phrasing, especially the 'short slurs' which exist both individually and within longer phrases. A quarter of a century ago, Puddy respected many of these details too, more so than did others. But his largely stark delivery doesn't match Martineau's flexibility and his blunt phrasing lacks the ductile 'give' of musicians such as Gervase de Peyer (1968) or Emma Johnson (2011).

Clashes of personality don't occur between Coppola and Staier. They interpret the texts within a framework of mutually passionate advocacy, *rubato* expressed through an elasticity of tempo that hews closely to the pulse, clean textures achieved through playing that reflects the timbres of each instrument. And Coppola doesn't elide slurs. He heightens their differences subtly yet markedly. Staier is every bit as artistically distinguished a partner; and soloist too in Op 118, the last piece (Intermezzo in E flat minor) exemplifying his comprehensive understanding of mood, pacing and tonal refinement. Superlatives all round.

Nalen Anthoni

Cl Sons – selected comparisons:

Peyer, Barenboim (5/68⁸, 12/05⁸) (EMI) 636466-2

Johnson, Lenehan (7/12) (NIMB) NI6153

Puddy, Martineau (ALLE) PCD994

Brahms • Mahler • Schumann

Brahms Piano Quartet No 1, Op 25 **Mahler** Piano Quartet **Schumann** Piano Quartet, Op 47

Daniel Hope vn **David Finckel** vc

Paul Neubauer va **Wu Han** pf

DG © 479 4609GH (77' • DDD)

Recorded live at Alice Tully Hall, New York, March 1 and 3, 2015



This album comes from a pair of live recitals given at Alice Tully Hall in March.

The three piano quartets are separated by a mere 34 years, the last of them the work of the teenage Mahler. The opening movement is the only one to survive complete and it shows that the composer had already taken on board the chamber music of Schumann and Brahms. The Maisky family gave a very heart-on-sleeve account at Martha Argerich's 2012 Lugano festival. This new one is less openly sobbing at the outset, but that's not to imply any lack of intensity, and the balance between the players is more egalitarian. Hope & Co also reveal a welcome lighter touch in the climax just after the six-minute mark.

The competition hots up in the remaining works. While the quality of these four players as chamber musicians is in no doubt, we occasionally find immediacy over finesse (in the finale of the Schumann, for instance, where Melnikov and the Jerusalem Quartet possess both drive and finish). The slow movement is one of the best things here, full-toned where needs be – as in the glorious theme itself, where David Finckel is more soulful

than the Jerusalem's Kyril Zlotnikov, though less refulgent than Gautier Capuçon on Virgin. However, put anyone alongside Argerich in the *Scherzo* and they seem sluggish and a touch earthbound, though the Trio section is very engaging.

There is much to admire in the Brahms, above all perhaps in the Intermezzo, with its fined-down string shadings, and the voluptuous warmth of the outer sections of the *Andante*. The finale is taken a degree faster by Hamelin and the Leopold Trio, and alongside the Canadian pianist's exuberant way with the virtuoso gypsy passages Wu Han sounds a little more cautious. Compared to the youthful vigour conveyed on the Hyperion disc, this new one sounds just a little portly. **Harriet Smith**

Mabler – selected comparison:

L, S & M Maisky, Chen (8/13) (EMI) 721119-2

Schumann – selected comparisons:

Argerich, R & G Capuçon, Chen (10/07) (EMI) 389241-2

Melnikov, Jerusalem Qt (7/12) (HARM) HMC90 2122

Brahms – selected comparison:

Hamelin, Leopold Stg Trio (1/07) (HYPERION) CDA67471/2

Bridge • d'Indy • Schulhoff

Bridge Sextet d'Indy Sextet, Op 92

Schulhoff Sextet

Parnassus Akademie

Et cetera © KTC1475 (73' • DDD)



Ensemble-in-residence at Belgium's Cultureel Centrum Maasmechelen, the

Parnassus Akademie was founded by cellist Michael Gross, best known for his work in Baroque music with Helmut Rilling, in order to re-explore the chamber repertoire by juxtaposing the rarely heard with the better known. The ensemble's debut CD, establishing them as a force to be reckoned with, places three radically different string sextets side by side.

This is the first outing on disc for d'Indy's *Sextuor*, a late work (1927) written in semi-retirement after his teaching career was over, though he seemingly relaxed neither his lofty stance nor his fondness for self-conscious infractions of tradition. Rather than thinking in terms of an ensemble of six, d'Indy writes for two string trios who sometimes play together but more often than not shuttle the material antiphonally between one another. In form, it's a suite, with an Entrée and Divertissement followed by a lengthy set of variations, in which the chromatic chordal theme gradually morphs, a bit too knowingly, into a quotation from the

Forest Murmurs from *Siegfried*. On a disc where the performances are as sharply differentiated as the content, the Akademie play it with a fastidious elegance that belies its technical difficulty.

The contrast with Bridge's lyrical expansiveness and Schulhoff's revolutionary anger couldn't be more pronounced. Bridge's E flat Sextet, dating from 1912, before wartime disillusionment darkened his style, is done with an opulent richness that obscures neither its complex cyclic structure nor the darker emotions that underscore it. Schulhoff's 1924 *Sextett*, which pulls everything from Schoenbergian expressionism to East European folk into a single eruptive whole, is a driven *tour de force* in which the concentration of the performance matches the extremity of the music, leaving you faintly shell-shocked by the end.

It's a difficult piece to follow, and the disc works better if you programme the three sextets in reverse order – Bridge first, Schulhoff last. Otherwise, it's a terrific achievement, and highly recommended.

Tim Ashley

Copland • Gershwin • Herrmann • Waxman

Copland Billy the Kid – Waltz and Celebration

Gershwin George Gershwin's Song-book.

Lullaby. Promenade (Walking the Dog)

Herrmann Souvenirs de voyage

Waxman Four Scenes from Childhood

The Nash Ensemble

Hyperion © CDA68094 (76' • DDD)



Bernard Herrmann was not satisfied with being a film composer of genius: he wanted to conquer the concert hall too, and 40 years after his death he's making some headway. There's a Bernard Herrmann Society and his film music is now getting a hearing in concert versions too. *Souvenirs*, his last concert work, is charmingly pastoral in a style that dates back almost a century, beautifully played here. In the 18 delightful piano transcriptions forming the *Gershwin Song-book*, the normally impeccable Ian Brown is not dry enough and his rhythms are sometimes flaccid. Gershwin said: 'One must guard against the tendency to make too frequent use of the sustaining pedal... The rhythms of American popular music should be made to snap, and at times to cackle.' There was a wonderful Gershwin LP by the versatile American pianist William Bolcom (Nonesuch, 1973, fortunately now on CD). As a composer too

he knew his way round these popular idioms. Then there's Peter Donohoe (EMI) with *Rhapsody in Blue* on the same CD, where he and Rattle know exactly how to play it tough rather than weakly sentimental.

Franz Waxman is another award-winning composer who worked in Hollywood and with Hitchcock. His unpretentious *Four Scenes from Childhood* were written for the birth of Heifetz's son in 1948. Copland arranged the two numbers from *Billy the Kid* himself – the Waltz is not in the Suite. **Peter Dickinson**

Dvořák

'String Quartets, Vol 2'

String Quartets – No 4, B19; No 13, Op 106 B192; No 14, Op 105 B193. Cypresses – No 4; No 5; No 8; No 9; No 10

Vogler Quartet

CPO © ② CPO777 625-2 (126' • DDD)

Dvořák • Schulhoff

'Česko'

Dvořák String Quartet No 13, Op 106 B192

Schulhoff String Quartet No 1. Esquisses de Jazz

Ragazze Quartet

Channel Classics © ② CCSSA36815

(65' • DDD/DSD)



Interesting the different available approaches to Op 106, among them the Prague Quartet, alert, vibrant, very full-on, The Lindsays and the Pavel Haas Quartet, who are not far behind them. The Vogler Quartet are more emphatic on their new release, even a little literal at times, and rather less sweet in terms of tonal projection. Their sonorous way with the wonderful *Adagio* more approximates late Beethoven, a not unreasonable route to take given the music's profound mood, whereas their *Molto vivace* third movement lilts along nicely, and the finale has plenty of fizz. The Voglers offer a level of gravitas that few quartets grant this still-underrated music.

The Ragazze Quartet on the other hand favour a lighter touch than either, with keen inflections, luminous textures (especially in the first movement) and a consistent sense of mobility. In their hands the *Adagio* feels anxious, its fervid climaxes brought to full heat without boiling over – just. Their *Molto vivace* is rather more urgent than the Voglers', their finale equally vital. Their biggest strength is an added quota of spontaneity, which keeps



'Keen inflections, luminous textures and a consistent sense of mobility' in the Ragazze Quartet's new recording of Dvořák's String Quartet No 13 on Channel Classics

you consistently engaged. And there are the Erwin Schulhoff fill-ups, especially the quarter-hour First Quartet with its deeply mysterious finale, a mix of ethereal chord structures, rocketing *crescendos*, eerie *sul ponticellos* and a hypnotic, slow-burning march rhythm (specifically at the close of the piece). Schulhoff's gnomic and mostly playful *Jazz Sketches* carry less emotional weight but at least edge us away from the programme in a buoyant mood. The playing throughout is full of character.

The Voglers tail Op 106 with five lyrical *Cypresses*, beautifully played, but their Beethovenian approach really comes into its own in Op 105. The first movement's arguments are taut and windblown, not unlike those of the Seventh Symphony, and the Voglers chart them with impressive authority. Quartet No 4 rages wild securely among Wagnerian terrains.

I still stand by the Pavel Haas Quartet in Op 106 (paired with the *American Quartet*) but for a coupling of the two late quartets the Vogler Quartet are impressive in their gritty, intensely dramatic way and the performances augur well for the rest of their cycle, a fair rival for the top-rating Prague and Panocha cycles (DG and Supraphon respectively). But as a one-off, innovative all-Czech programme, the

Ragazze Quartet's Channel Classics CD is mightily impressive, too. **Rob Cowan**

Op 106 – selected comparisons:

Pavel Haas Qt (12/10) (SUPR) SU4038-2

Lindsay Qt (ASV) CDDCA797

Panocha Qt (SUPR) SU3815-2 or SU4048-2

Prague Qt (DG) 463 165-2GB9

Ernst

'Fantaisie brillante – The Virtuoso Violin'

Ernst *Fantaisie brillante sur la Marche et la Romance de l'opéra Otello de Rossini*, Op 11. *Rondino grazioso*, Op 13 No 2. *Morceaux de salon*, Op 13 No 1. *La Romanesca. Elegie*, Op 10. *String Quartet. Nocturnes*, Op 8. *Feuillet d'album. Pensées fugitives (Les gages d'amitié)*; *Morceaux de salon*, Op 25 – No 1; No 2; No 3. *Deux Romances*, Op 15. *Variations on Hérold's Le Pré aux Clercs* **Wieniawski Réverie** **Thomas Christian** *vn* **Evgeniy Sinayskiy** *pf* **Thomas Christian Ensemble** CPO © ② CPO777 894-2 (158' • DDD)



Ernst in their repertoire. This latest addition to the catalogue offers further

evidence of a skilful and often inspired composer. He may be best known for the wrist-crippling difficulties of his F sharp minor Concerto and *Six Polyphonic Studies* but here it is Ernst the lyricist of 'tender and sweeping expression' that dominates.

That said, Thomas Christian opens with the early bravura *Fantasy on Rossini's 'Otello'*, accompanied not by an orchestra (Ruggiero Ricci, Ilya Grubert inter alios) or piano (Ilya Gringolts, Leonidas Kavakos) but by a string quintet, following Ernst's frequent performance practice. Sweet of tone and with an almost Heifetzian intensity when needed, Christian is formidably au fait with Ernst's unique voice, leading performances of unobtrusive refinement that present this and the other works here in an ideal light and recorded sound. The B flat major String Quartet, which appeared in Toccata Classics's continuing Ernst series last year (I have yet to hear this), while not thematically memorable reflects the composer's reverence for Beethoven.

Disc 2 opens with a delightful collection of 14 short works (37'26") called *Pensées fugitives* (the booklet carelessly gives it as *Pansée fugitives*) written in conjunction with the pianist Stephen (not Stephan as in the booklet) Heller. For this and the four other works on the second disc, Christian is

joined by pianist Evgney Sinayskiy, who frequently has his work cut out and brings the same lightness of touch – and often witty repartee – to proceedings (try the *Variations on Hérold's 'Le Pré aux Clercs'*). This highly recommended release ends with Wieniawski's *Rêverie*, dedicated to Ernst, his friend and quartet colleague.

CPO's presentation could be better: the front illustration (a painting that features the title-page of a Bach album in the background) is awful; within, the cover of Mark Rowe's authoritative Ernst biography is badly reproduced and without a credit; the booklet-notes leave a lot to be desired; and the rear track-listing repeats 'Pensée' and gives the selection from *Six Morceaux*, Op 25, as 'Nos 1, 24 and 34'. Doesn't anybody check these things? **Jeremy Nicholas**

Grieg • Hough • Mendelssohn

Grieg Cello Sonata, Op 36 **Hough** Sonata for Cello and Piano Left Hand, 'Les adieux'

Mendelssohn Cello Sonata No 2, Op 58

Steven Isserlis *vc* **Stephen Hough** *pf*

Hyperion © CDA68079 (72' • DDD)



Steven Isserlis is a past master when it comes to matching his pianists to repertoire:

Robert Levin in Beethoven, Dénes Várjon in Schumann and Stephen Hough in sonatas from Brahms to Rachmaninov and now those of Grieg and Mendelssohn.

Isserlis and Hough balance the urgency of the opening theme of Grieg's glorious sonata with a luminous reading of the rhapsodic second idea and everywhere their reading glints with conviction. Hough sets a slightly faster pace in the second movement than Pascal Amoyel for Bertrand (another exceptionally fine interpretation), and Isserlis is matchless in the way he tugs at the simple melody to heart-rending effect. The cellist is also deeply moving in the solo opening of the third movement before the lively *Halling* bursts in.

Isserlis has previously recorded Mendelssohn's Second Sonata with the fortepianist Melvyn Tan. Now his range of colours is wider still, his intensity more unfettered, and everywhere you have the sense that he and Hough are egging one another on, unafraid to take risks. The slow movement is a thing of beauty, with all the yearning that you'd expect but also a freedom that Hough sets up beautifully in his finely nuanced opening soliloquy. It's more rhetorical than Huw Watkins or Larry Todd, and Isserlis's sense of impassioned

yearning is even more affecting than Paul Watkins and a great deal more palatable than the histrionic sobbing tone of Mischa Maisky. We're also reminded of Hough's great affinity for Mendelssohn (remember those concerto recordings from 15 years ago?) in the way he can combine airiness of texture and brilliance of articulation while moving at speed, and the finale is one of the most exuberant on disc.

In between we get Hough's own Sonata for cello and piano left hand, a work whose single movement has three distinct sections. Its nickname of *Les adieux* refers not only to Beethoven's sonata of that name but also to Dussek's, while the marking of *Im Legendenton* over the second part refers us back to Schumann. It's unafraid to breathe an air of nostalgia – making it a good companion to the other sonatas here – but the results are refreshingly personal. One of the sonata's most fascinating aspects is the close interplay between the two protagonists, their lines often entwined, with the piano frequently leading the way, drawing the cello up into the treble register. The second section has a hypnotic, slightly Eastern quality to its lines, while the rapt final section hovers, shimmers and finally achieves stasis, the cello returning to the *pizzicato* of the outset, now resolved on its lowest note. The performance couldn't be more persuasive and the two players are beautifully recorded, with Isserlis providing typically engaging notes. **Harriet Smith**

Grieg – selected comparison:

Bertrand, Amoyel (HARM) HMC90 1986

Mendelssohn – selected comparisons:

Isserlis, Tan (3/95) (RCA) 09026 62553-2

Maisky, Tiempo (A/02) (DG) 471 565-2GH

P & H Watkins (12/11) (CHAN) CHAN10701

Green, Todd (1/15) (JRI) J138

Hummel

'Piano Trios, Vol 2'

Piano Trios – No 1, Op 12; No 4, Op 65;

No 5, 'Grand Trio concertante', Op 83

Gould Piano Trio

Naxos © 8 573261 (62' • DDD)



If your musical tastes err towards the sunny, optimistic and playful rather than the heavyweight, gloomy and probing, let me direct you to the (seven) piano trios of Hummel. This second volume from the Gould Trio takes us from the late 1790s to about 1814. Within the first eight bars of Op 12, we have been taken to a happy place, the musical language clearly a continuation of the classical tradition

inherited from Hummel's teacher, Mozart, but no mere birthday present to him or Haydn. The heart-easing theme with its lightly worn counterpoint is as inspired and skilfully wrought as anything they wrote and, Hummel being a virtuoso pianist, with far more demanding keyboard parts. This is especially true of the last work here, subtitled *Grand Trio concertante* and dedicated to his friend Johann Baptist Cramer, 'a concerto in all but name' (Keith Anderson's fine booklet-note). The syncopated main theme of the final rondo (maddeningly catchy) is the sort of thing Herz or Kalkbrenner would dream up a few years later.

So – music well worth befriending (it is a pleasure to listen to all three three-movement works without a break), especially in such lively company. In terms of other *intégrales*, Lucy Gould (violin), Alice Neary (cello) and Benjamin Frith (piano) are clearly preferable to the heavy-handed Borodin Trio (Chandos), Frith in particular dancing his way with palpable pleasure through the many pages of non-stop *allegro vivace* and *presto* semiquavers. Well recorded, too; but I retain a marginal preference for my benchmark: the Trio Parnassus (recorded 1987/88) have a better string-and-piano integration, observe more acutely than the Gould Trio Hummel's dynamic markings and inject the feel of a live performance into the playing (I give you the coda of Op 83). Still, at Naxos's price, I guarantee you won't be disappointed. **Jeremy Nicholas**

Pf Trios – selected comparison:

Trio Parnassus (6/93⁸) (MDG) MDG303 0307-2

Kuhlau

Piano Quartets – No 1, Op 32; No 2, Op 50

Copenhagen Piano Quartet

Dacapo © 6 220596 (73' • DDD/DSD)



Friedrich Daniel Rudolph Kuhlau (1786-1832): a good subject for a pub quiz.

Can you name a one-eyed composer? Who, besides Berg, wrote an opera called *Lulu*? Poor Kuhlau doesn't get much of a look in these days – a shame, because he is a most interesting composer. Not an Olympian but a gifted melodist and craftsman whose prolific output extended to successful operas, myriad flute studies (he was known as 'the Beethoven of the flute', despite not playing the instrument) and, as any fledgling pianist will know, numerous piano sonatinas (which of us has not played the C major, Op 20 No 1?).

New Releases

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PIANIST VLADIMIR FELTSMAN IN CONVERSATION WITH NIMBUS ARTISTIC DIRECTOR, ADRIAN FARMER



AF: When we began recording Schubert two years ago you said to me that playing Schubert was returning to your first love. How, as a Russian, a product of the soviet system, did Schubert come to be your first love?

VF: I fell in love with music through Schubert, I don't even remember what it was, but I was thirteen or fourteen years old. As we all know first love, be it human love or musical love, you never forget it, it stays with you. I am not young anymore, at sixty three I am not really old, but I felt, in a sense, it was time to complete the circle.

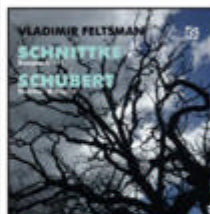
AF: Let me ask you about practice.

VF: I practice a maximum of an hour a day. I will practice to learn something new, like a special project for the Aspen Music Festival, but not something which has been with me for most of my life. I hope I know what I am doing by now! All I have to do is to keep my head lucid and make myself available for whatever comes through, so that I don't obstruct it, particularly in the case of Schubert. I personally don't take credit in what is going on, the only credit I take is to make myself available for the music to speak.

AF: When I talk about the recording sessions that we've had together, people ask me: what is Vladimir Feltsman like to work with? And I say he very seldom ever actually does more than two performances of anything, why is that?

VF: Adrian, when I come to work with you I know what I want. It's a very clear picture and if I don't know what I'm doing twice then I had better go and drive a cab or cook soup or do something else. I don't believe if you play it five or ten times that it will be any better, it's as simple as that.

Watch the full conversation at youtube.com/NimbusRecordsTV



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Gramophone Editor's Choice Recordings

Disc of the month

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Schulhoff	+ Bridge String Sextets	Parnassus Akademie	£12.00
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GRAMOPHONE *Collector*

CONTEMPORARY QUARTETS

Richard Whitehouse assesses the state of the string quartet in the 21st century in a selection of six recent discs



The Jack Quartet, whose new disc features works by members of the áltaVoz composer consortium

For all its inherent abstraction, the string quartet continues to prove as versatile a medium as any – as this selection of new releases amply demonstrates. First up is the Jack Quartet, whose modernist credentials are to the fore in compressed yet visceral one-movement pieces by the **áltaVoz Composers**, who include Felipe Lara, José Luis Hurtado and Mauricio Pauly. Most substantial is the Third Quartet by Jorge Villavicencio Grossmann, its *Música fúnebre y nocturna* subtitle most evident in the sustained and unremitting intensity of its closing passacaglia. Impressive performances from an ensemble who are surely poised to take on the mantle of the fabled Arditti Quartet.

Mention of the Arditti leads to a disc of music by Italian composer **Dario Palermo**, whose predilection for combining instruments with real-time electronics is evident in the three pieces here. The pulsating intricacy of the 'lunar dance' that is *RO* and the ethereal after-tones of *TRANCE* both look back to the heyday of electroacoustics in the 1980s, while the appreciably longer *The Difference Engine* features a haunting contribution from mezzo Catherine Carter over the course of a work whose diverse components amount to a cohesive and inevitable whole. An arresting collection, by no means as hard-going as its turgid booklet-note might suggest.

From the other end of the aesthetic spectrum, 'Music for String Quartet, Piano and Celeste' comprises 11 pieces by Scottish composer **Francis Macdonald**, whose variously descriptive and evocative titles are often only obliquely conveyed through the pervasive post-minimalist idiom. The playing of musicians from the Scottish Ensemble is wholly attuned to this ethos, while the short playing time is easily accommodated at a single sitting; and it is not wholly the composer's fault that such an approach sounds increasingly mired in its own limitations.







Similar in age though very different in outlook, Polish composer **Aleksander Kościów** will be a new name to most in the UK, but a disc with five of his string quartets (all written between 1997 and 2013) deserves wide exposure. Most immediate is the Tenth Quartet, whose eight movements evince a level of formal freedom without the result seeming vague or unfocused. Most impressive is the Sixth Quartet, its two movements sharing common material in what amounts to a telling 'unity within diversity', while the remaining pieces are single-movement entities whose essentially serious cast is kept from dourness by the skilful handling of quartet textures. Dedicated playing from the NeoQuartet underlines the distinctiveness of this music.

Having recorded the quartet output of R Murray Schafer and Alfred Schnittke,

the Montreal-based Quatuor Molinari now turn to that of **Sofia Gubaidulina**. Her four quartets chart a two-decade transition from relative obscurity to international acclaim: interesting that the biggest difference comes between the elegiac stasis of the Second Quartet and the textural volatility of the Third, written in the same year (1987), while the First and Fourth Quartets confirm a transition from arresting diffuseness to focused unity. This quality is equally evident in the highly concentrated String Trio included on a second disc between the early, Shostakovich-permeated Piano Quintet and combative violin-and-cello sonata *Rejoice!*. Rounded off by the pungent *Reflections on the Theme B-A-C-H*, this is an impressive and absorbing conspectus.

The quartet output of **Thomas Adès** amounts to barely an hour, yet these three works provide a viable overview of an evolution as fascinating as it is disconcerting. This is not to question the insight of the Calder Quartet, who bring keen eloquence to the stylised miniatures of *Arcadiana* (a more robust approach is that by the Signum Quartet on *Capriccio*, thoughtfully placed between the quartets of Debussy and Ravel – reviewed next month), confidently define the teasing classicism of the Piano Quintet in the company of the composer, and bring a tensile expressive poise to *The Four Quartets* – Adès's most recent such piece, whose diurnal progress is in itself a take on the Classical sequence of movements, rendered from an oblique and intriguing remove. **G**

THE RECORDINGS

	Various Cpsrs 'áltaVoz Composers' Jack Qt New Focus (F) FCR150
	Palermo Wks for Stg Qt Arditti Qt et al Amirani (F) AMRN040
	Macdonald Music for Stg Qt & Celeste Scottish Ens TR7 (M) TRCD15001
	Kościów Stg Qts Nos 3, 5, 6, 9 & 10 NeoQuartet DUX (F) DUX1171
	Gubaidulina Chbr Wks Molinari Qt; Bessette ATMA Classique (F) (2) ACD2 2689
	Adès 'The Twenty-Fifth Hour' Calder Qt; Adès Signum (F) SIGCD413

Kuhlau's reverence for and friendship with Beethoven informed much of his music. His C major Piano Concerto is closely modelled on Beethoven's (try Michael Ponti's superb recording – Unicorn-Kanchana, 9/91 – if you can track it down) and the first movement of his C minor Piano Quartet borrows thematic material from Beethoven's Third Piano Concerto. If you like your mid-period Beethoven chamber music with more than a dash of Hummel and Weber, then you'll enjoy the results. After an *Adagio* (A flat major, not A major as the booklet says) comes a lively finale complete with well-worked fugue (Beethoven jokingly referred to Kuhlau as 'der grosse Kanonier').

Kuhlau was a brilliant pianist and the four-movement Piano Quartet No 2, written about the same time (early 1820s) as No 1, has a no less demanding piano part. It is the bolder, more inventive work of the two with a final *Allegro di molto* in which, as the booklet puts it, 'Kuhlau demonstrates his contrapuntal mastery and the refined ear for harmony that one has to go to the greatest composers of the age to match'.

Ilona Prunyi and the New Budapest Quartet recorded both works in 1992 for Marco Polo. The recording and their playing are less refined than the Copenhagen Quartet's and are less pleasurable to listen to, though their faster movements are more flamboyant and the piano is beneficially slightly better integrated with the strings. But no: let's have the Third Quartet and some more Kuhlau from these fine young Danish musicians.

Jeremy Nicholas

Liszt

'Works for Two Pianos'

Concerto pathétique, S268. Grand Concert Piece on Mendelssohn's Songs Without Words, S257. Hexaméron, S654. Réminiscences de Norma, S655. Réminiscences de Don Juan, S656. **Piano Duo Genova & Dimitrov**
CPO © CPO777 896-2 (73' • DDD)



Wikipedia describes the Piano Duo Genova & Dimitrov as 'a Bulgarian piano duo, considered both by the world music press and the audience one of the world's finest and most successful young ensembles'. I wonder who wrote that...? Aglika Genova (b1971) and Liuben Dimitrov (b1969) have been playing together for 25 years and, in the UK at least, currently enjoy a very low profile: their only previous appearance in these pages was in November 2010 when

I welcomed their performances of Mendelssohn's early two-piano concertos.

The duo's programme makes us, not for the first time, gawp in wonderment at Liszt's industry. Here are but five of his works for two pianos, four of them (sometimes substantial) reworkings of earlier solo works, each page of every score black with notes. The most interesting, in one sense, is the *Grand Concert Piece on Mendelssohn's Songs Without Words*, the only piece here that has no equivalent solo version. It was written in 1834 but not given its premiere until 1984 (Richard and John Contiguglia). A flamboyant introduction leads to three linked treatments of Mendelssohn's Op 19 Nos 1, 6 (the famous 'Venetian Gondola') and 3 ('Hunting Song'), transforming their intimate originals into a fast-slow-fast mini-concerto. We should hear it more often. The duo play it with exactly the right exuberance and with flawless ensemble.

The same is true of the *Concerto pathétique* (a sort of rehearsal for the great B minor Sonata, with which it shares similar material) and the other more familiar works. With its significant divergences from the solo version, despite the redistribution of material, Liszt lets neither pianist off the hook in the *Réminiscences de Don Juan*, though the final pages lack the spine tingle generated inherently by the heroic solo version. The late (1870) two-piano heavily abridged version of *Hexaméron* is a curiosity but not a patch on the 1838 original, especially when Liszt includes only three of the variations (Thalberg's, Czerny's and his own): *Hexaméron* turned *Ternion*, you might say. **Jeremy Nicholas**

Reich

Music for 18 Musicians

Ensemble Signal / Brad Lubman

Harmonia Mundi © HMU90 7608 (59' • DDD)



As recently as the mid-1990s it seemed inconceivable that Steve Reich's *Music for 18 Musicians* would be performed and recorded by any ensemble other than his own group of highly trained, skilled and accomplished musicians. After all, this 60-minute work – one of the most significant and groundbreaking compositions of the late 20th century – was written very much with Steve Reich and Musicians in mind.

How times have changed. Since the landmark 1978 ECM release (which

remains a benchmark for future recordings), one can now select from any number, including Ensemble Modern (RCA, 6/99), the Amadinda Percussion Group (Hungaroton, 6/91), the Grand Valley State University New Music Ensemble (Innova) and now Ensemble Signal directed by Brad Lubman.

Reich has described this recording as 'extraordinary' and he's usually right about performances of his music. Signal's technical control and precision, combined with Lubman's ability to project the broad sweep of the work's internal dimensions, is sustained throughout the recording. Take the opening 'Pulses' section, for example, where the work's foundations are set out in a gradually unfolding sequence of 11 harmonically related chords. Ensemble Modern move purposefully through the sequence and arrive at the end of the cycle well within the five-minute mark. The Grand Valley Ensemble, on the other hand, impart smooth, almost dream-like transitions between each chord, resulting in a drawn out, slow-motion effect. Ensemble Signal manage to do both by increasing the music's pulse rate while at the same time slowing down its harmonic rhythm, which results in an opening section that clocks in at almost five and a half minutes.

The group demonstrates its true quality during the middle sections of the work, however. Drive and momentum are applied to the tonic-dominant pendulum heard at Section IIIA, while Section V's contrapuntal combinations are perfectly judged. Lubman ensures that the tempo remains buoyant during Sections VI-VIII (the so-called 'maracas' sections), and convincingly negotiates the somewhat tricky transition from Section XI back to the closing 'Pulses' section.

So does this recording present the final word on Reich's masterwork? Not a bit of it. Previous recordings have shown how performances of so-called minimalist music can produce diverse and contrasting interpretations. Ensemble Signal's new recording proves that there are still plenty of secrets to be revealed in this music.

Pwyll ap Siôn

Schubert

String Quintet, D956

Kuijken Quartet; Michel Boulanger VC

Challenge Classics © CC72647 (53' • DDD)



You might well assume that the name 'Kuijken' would mean this is a period-instrument



'Exuberance and flawless ensemble' from Piano Duo Genova & Dimitrov in their new disc of works for two pianos by Liszt on CPO

account of Schubert's mighty Quintet. But no: two generations of that remarkable musical dynasty opt for modern instruments, joined by first cellist Michel Boulanger. The first thing to say is that there's no sense of four plus one that can afflict some line-ups (the Takács and Ralph Kirshbaum, for instance). The approach in this new recording is inevitably and refreshingly period-inflected. The slow movement, for instance, is strikingly sparing in its vibrato, the sustained chords of second violin, viola and first cello unflinching in their plainness. Their speed proves much more sustainable than the Diotima/Gastinel reading – a blot on that otherwise fascinating landscape. This new version is a world away from the Pavel Haas, who are somewhat slower in this *Adagio* but who hypnotically lead you onwards through Schubert's vast structure. When it comes to the tumultuous F minor section the PHQ find a raw agony that is matched by few – certainly the Kuijken are lower-voltage here. The resignation of the coda is beautifully judged, though, with the individual instruments held in perfect balance.

The Kuijken pace the opening movement very naturally and the second theme, with its warmly duetting cellists, is just one instance of the quality of their musicianship. There's a tremendous sense of Schubert's desolation in this most undesolate of keys. The Kuijken's finale is

more downtrodden than most yet it's all of a piece with their approach as a whole, in which resignation plays a major part. Perhaps I would have liked more to have been made of the contrasting Viennese-tinged theme; but here, as throughout, they reveal the music's emotional ambiguity most convincingly and it makes for a draining but enriching 53 minutes. If the PHQ's vision is too rich for your tastes, then this more ascetic view might well appeal and the very naturally balanced recording is another plus. **Harriet Smith**

Selected comparisons:

Takács Qt, Kirshbaum (12/12) (HYPE) CDA67864

Pavel Haas Qt, Ishizaka (10/13) (SUPR) SU4110-2

Diotima Qt, Gastinel (2/14) (NAIV) V5331

Shostakovich

String Quartets – No 1, Op 49; No 8, Op 110; No 14, Op 142. Three Pieces, Op 36a

Borodin Quartet

Decca © 478 8205DH (76' • DDD)



However many incarnations it goes through, the Borodin Quartet brand

somehow never loses its cachet, despite the fact that, in Shostakovich at least, it has never recaptured the special qualities of its heyday in the 1960s. The opening

movement of this latest account of the First Quartet immediately presents its credentials with a brand of *sostenuto* that brings out something more stoical than mere expressivity, with plenty of further detail in the articulation to reinforce that impression.

Yet at the same time there are aspects that strain the most charitable ears. Above all there is the first violin's tone, which is curiously lacking in warmth and flexibility; in fact 'strangled' is the word that came to mind. Then the viola theme in the second movement is so uninflected as to come across as simply unimaginative, while the more energetic writing in the *Scherzo* and finale sounds gruff and, more surprisingly, not always as polished as it might be. Perhaps the acoustic of Moscow's Victor Popov Academy of Choral Arts – singularly unforgiving, at least as here recorded – is partly to blame.

Certainly the *Allegro molto* of the Eighth Quartet is of demonstration standard: not super-fast but still compelling in its weighty intransigence. However, here again the slow movements – all three of them – are flat and stilted. Mixed results in the Fourteenth, too, where the Italianate interludes of which the composer himself was so fond pass by with barely a flicker of emotion. A wonderfully dry account of the wicked Polka does little to redeem a disc that for me is a severe disappointment.

David Fanning

Bruno Walter

Richard Osborne on a musician who worked with Mahler, became one of Europe's finest conductors between the wars and enjoyed an extraordinary Indian Summer in California

A conductor of superior endowments and great experience' was Sir Adrian Boult's obituary tribute to Bruno Walter.

It was Gustav Mahler who in 1894 spotted an unusually gifted 18-year-old répétiteur at the Hamburg Opera. And it was Mahler who invited him to join the Vienna Opera as a house conductor in 1901, burying concerns about the hurt that might be done to this highly strung 25-year-old by Vienna's anti-Semitic press.

Being apprenticed to the greatest conductor of the age was a unique privilege, though being in thrall to Mahler's every whim may not entirely have helped Walter's as yet unstabilised talent. (There were psychosomatic problems and, as with Mahler, a consultation with Freud.) 'This strange man seems to be constantly in a fever, pro and contra,' wrote Hugo von Hofmannsthal in 1912. As late as 1923, a Walter recording of Mendelssohn's *Hebrides* Overture is by turns lovingly drawn and feverishly quick.

Walter's work, once settled, was rooted in sympathy, both musical and human. Yehudi Menuhin, who first appeared with him in 1929, cherished a man who treated musicians as 'living, pulsing, feeling human beings upon whom the grid of dogma could not be dropped'. The craft was consummate. Where Stravinsky marvelled at Walter's nimbleness as accompanist in his Piano Concerto, a back-desk viola player in Rome's Augusteo Orchestra emerged from a performance of Brahms's First Symphony as if from a trance. 'So intimate was my contact with him, I felt as if I had been playing a solo concerto,' Carlo Maria Giulini later recalled.

During his Munich years (1913-22) Walter won a reputation as Germany's finest opera conductor. The young Karl Böhm learned his Wagner and Mozart at Walter's feet; Adrian Boult merely gloried in it as a visitor. (Even as an old man Boult thought Walter's Mozart incomparable.) But it was singers who remembered Walter with the deepest affection. The great Hans Hotter traced his grasp of the human dimension of Wagnerian music-drama to a single Walter rehearsal of Wotan's 'Farewell'. 'Today music is too often thought of as if it sprang

from the keyboard, or the typewriter,' wrote Menuhin. 'Bruno Walter always talked in terms of the human voice.'

Sadly Walter's career rarely ran smoothly for long. Ethel Smyth, whose *The Wreckers* Walter had conducted at Covent Garden in 1910, claimed that he was driven from Munich by 'that Jew-baiting which monarchic Bavaria is carrying to all length'. Munich's loss was London's gain. Between 1924 and 1931 Walter had charge of Covent Garden's German seasons. A fabled production of *Der Rosenkavalier* with Lotte Lehmann, Elisabeth Schumann and Richard Mayr was one triumph; another was Walter's persuading the Covent Garden board to allow *Die Fledermaus* into its hallowed precinct. Then, as the economy reeled, Walter read in a newspaper that he had been replaced by Beecham, entering stage left with sackfuls of borrowed cash.

In 1933 Walter was banned from his native Germany. Yet this was the decade in which he did some of his best work and made some of his finest recordings under legendary HMV producer Fred Gaisberg in Vienna, London and Paris. (Most of these, including the famous 1938 Mahler Ninth, are included in EMI Icon's nine-CD 'Bruno Walter:

The Early Recordings'.)

The great bugbear is that Walter – in his mid-70s and living in California when LP arrived in 1950 – missed out on the golden age of complete opera recording. His glorious 1935 Vienna recording of Act 1 of *Die Walküre* is the closest we come to that. Radio transmissions of *Don Giovanni* and *Fidelio* from the New York Met in 1941-42 only serve to confirm what we missed. As Alan Blyth put it, 'Once you have encountered Walter in these pieces few others will do'.

A Salzburg production of *Don Giovanni* with Ezio Pinza in the title-role was much celebrated (a 1937 recording is extant). Yet even here tragedy lurked. In August 1939 Walter's younger daughter – recently married but still emotionally involved with Pinza – was shot dead by her husband. Walter's wife never recovered from the trauma (she died in 1945) and nor did Walter, though many believed that these sorrows brought added depth to his work.

DEFINING MOMENTS

- **1894** – *A life-changing encounter*
Meets Gustav Mahler in Hamburg
- **1911** – *A Mahler first*
Conducts the posthumous premiere of Mahler's *Das Lied von der Erde*
- **1939** – *The start of US life*
Emigrates to the USA after family tragedy and the outbreak of war
- **1947** – *Tours with VPO*
Conducts the Vienna Philharmonic at the first Edinburgh Festival
- **1958** – *Indian Summer*
Begins recording his late legacy in stereo for CBS in Los Angeles

THE ESSENTIAL RECORDING



Mahler
Symphony No 4
Desi Halban *sop*
New York PO / Walter
Sony Classical © 7
88691 92010-2



Bruno Walter's final appearance with the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra in 1960

The war over, Walter recorded a sublime Mahler Fourth with the New York Philharmonic and in 1947 the first ever Mahler Fifth, a performance of exemplary pedigree and searing directness which decisively upends the idea that Walter was an over-indulgent conductor (listen to how his *Adagietto* flows) or, as Otto Klemperer maliciously claimed, 'too Jewish'.

In 1947 Walter appeared at the inaugural Edinburgh Festival. His name alone, founder-director Rudolf Bing later revealed, persuaded the civic authorities to give the festival the go-ahead – that and the presence of the much-loved Vienna Philharmonic, duly de-Nazified (Bing calculated) by Walter's presence on the podium. There were those within the Jewish community who never forgave Walter for this. To Walter, however, humankind's capacity for making scapegoats of individuals – or, worse, communities – was a great evil. He shared the belief of his friend Thomas Mann that psychic epidemics are as great a threat to mankind as physical ones.

To some Walter became a plaster saint, too much influenced in his final years by the work of the Austrian

anthroposophist Rudolf Steiner. In reality, his beliefs had been forged over a lifetime of contemplation and study. His hostility to atonal music – Walter considered the phrase an oxymoron – didn't help his reputation.

His late Los Angeles recordings contain many treasures, including accounts of Brahms's Third Symphony and Bruckner's Fourth which put most modern versions to shame. And there was more Mahler.

Walter's Mahler recordings are a unique legacy, more substantial than Oskar Fried's much studied 1923-24 recording of the Second Symphony or those Mengelberg conducting scores, heavily annotated in red ink ('all pointing to a tendency for exaggeration' said Walter) over which conductors now pour.

One of Walter's last recordings was of Mahler's First Symphony. It may lack the Promethean fire of his 1954 New York version but such was its quality that CBS felt it must postpone the Mahler First with which Leonard Bernstein was about to launch his pioneering Mahler cycle. Bernstein was not amused – until he heard the tapes. 'It's unbelievable!' he told Schuyler Chapin. 'Forget it for me this year. We'll wait for ever if necessary. It is his.' 6

'He treated musicians as human beings upon whom the grid of dogma couldn't be dropped' – Yehudi Menuhin

Instrumental



Lindsay Kemp reviews a selection of Sweelinck's harpsichord works:

'It is pleasingly international, wafting in through our Amsterdam window strains of Germany, Spain, Italy and England' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 61**



Philip Clark on 'The Precise Music of Galina Ustvolskaya' on DVD:

'Grotz sculpts a mighty dialogue between smashed-up scalic patterns and cushioning chorales' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 61**

Chaminade

Piano Sonata, Op 21. Etude symphonique, Op 28. Etudes de concert, Op 35. Etude mélodique, Op 118. Etude pathétique, Op 124. Etude romantique, Op 132. Etude humoristique, Op 138. Etude scolastique, Op 139. Souvenir d'enfance

Johann Blanchard *pf*

Dabringhaus und Grimm (P) (D) MDG904 1871-6 (78' • DDD/DSD)



Cécile Chaminade had two things going against her as a composer. The first

was that she was a woman in a man's world; the second that she produced so many works (around 400) that it's easy to be bamboozled by her fecundity. Add to that the fact that she was also very long-lived – so her music had fallen out of fashion well before her death in 1944.

Johann Blanchard is not yet 30 and came across Chaminade's music almost by accident (the story involves a relative's garage, a diplomat's pianist son and 20 boxes of scores and manuscripts). What attracted him was the sheer range of Chaminade's music and that is certainly demonstrated in this thoughtfully chosen programme, which he performs on a well-preserved Steinway from 1901. He begins with her C minor Sonata, a striking combination of high emotions, serious virtuosity and a penchant for fugal writing. Its second movement is an extended reverie in which Blanchard revels in the subtlety of her textures, while the finale has a Schumannesque tumultuousness about it.

The Etudes show a different side of the composer and they are full of deft touches, whether in the delicate roulades that feather the lines of the *Etude symphonique* or the gentleness of the outer portions of 'Automne' from the *Etudes de concert*, Op 35. In the *Etude pathétique* Blanchard gives his all, clarifying the sometimes dense writing, while the *Etude mélodique* flows effortlessly. There were times where an even bigger technique might have come in handy in order to give a more insouciant virtuosity to

numbers such as the 'Tarantelle' from Op 35 or the fiery central section of 'Automne'. But the final *Souvenir d'enfance*, a world premiere recording, is charmingly done. **Harriet Smith**

Glass

Partita. Einstein on the Beach – Knee 2.

Book of Longing – solo violin music.

Violin Concerto No 2 – Interludes

Tim Fain *vn*

Orange Mountain Music (P) (D) OMM0050 (46' • DDD)



Tim Fain's combination of power, precision and deeply expressive playing has made his recordings almost as ubiquitous as Philip Glass's music. Chances are that you have already heard his distinctive violin on soundtracks to *Black Swan* or *Twelve Years a Slave*, but there are far more strings to this violinist's bow than film music.

Fain's debut recording, 'Arches' (Image Recordings, 2008), featured new works for solo violin by Kevin Puts and Daniel Ott alongside an impressively controlled performance of Bach's Solo Partita No 2 in D minor, and was soon brought to Glass's attention during recording sessions for the composer's cycle of Leonard Cohen poems, *The Book of Longing* (2008). Fain's cameo performance on the latter work is heard on 'I Enjoyed the Laughter', played again by him here in a version simply called *Book of Longing*. One can see why Glass was keen to collaborate further: his transparent and direct style demands crystal-clear articulation and razor-sharp accuracy, attributes that Fain's playing possesses in abundance.

The Partita for solo violin, composed especially for Fain in 2011, comprises seven movements, which (with the exception of the 'Opening') are grouped neatly into alternating pairs of songs, dances and chaconnes. The near absence in some movements of Glass's trademark triadic ostinatos and scale passages will come as a surprise to some, maybe a relief to others; however, a minor-key darkness and

intensity typical of the composer is sustained throughout. The fiery 'Dance 2' probably comes closest to 'default' Glass, and, as if to make the point, Fain's brilliant, scintillating rendition of 'Knee 2' from *Einstein on the Beach*, previously heard on 'River of Light' (Naxos 8.559662), is also included.

The disc ends with a set of four Interludes for solo violin which form part of Glass's Violin Concerto No 2. Again, Fain's incisive playing cuts through, and is altogether more direct and immediate than Robert McDuffie's live recording with Marin Alsop and the LPO (Orange Mountain, 12/10). **Pwyll ap Siôn**

Mozart

Piano Sonatas – No 11, K331;

No 17, K570; No 18, K576

Menahem Pressler *pf*

La Dolce Volta (P) (D) LDV19 (61' • DDD)



A lifetime of experience is the gift bestowed on Menahem Pressler.

This thrusting and exploratory leader of the Beaux Arts Trio, one of the most eminent groups in the second half of the last century, probably has – at 92 – an intellectual and emotional grasp of music second to none. Indomitable indeed he is, but the dynamism and razor-edge security of yore have lost their shine.

Stiffness of finger-movement may be responsible for traces of rigidity in his playing. The opening *Andante grazioso* of K331 has a sameness of expression with little concern for changes in inflection or emphasis. No hushed sound at the beginning of the A minor Var 3; and barely acknowledged is the change to *Adagio* in Var 5. If the slow movement of K570 offers not much more than a prosaic exposition of the notes, the corresponding movement of K576 flows better. Fast movements suggest that Pressler now tailors his playing according to physical limitations. Once he had none.



'An intellectual and emotional grasp of music second to none': 92-year-old Menahem Pressler plays Mozart sonatas on his new La Dolce Volta disc

His erstwhile mastery over articulation and dynamic variation allied to a fine sense of rhythm, so vibrant a part of his musical ethos – ineffable freedom within regularity, tension and relaxation emanating from careful organisation of stresses, unwritten microscopic changes of tempo giving life to line and phrase – are not much in evidence but are found among countless examples in the Beaux Arts set of Haydn's piano trios. Those performances 40-odd years later still have the power to uphold the sheer wondrousness of the music. Thanks to Menahem Pressler. **Nalen Anthoni**

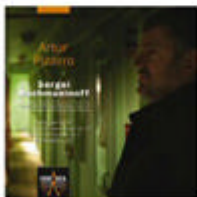
Rachmaninov

'Complete Piano Works, Vol 2'

Preludes - Op 23; Op 32. Morceaux de fantaisie, Op 3. Variations on a Theme of Chopin, Op 22

Artur Pizarro *pf*

Odradek (M) (2) ODRCD316 (134' • DDD)



If the outwardly enviable, note-perfect professionalism of so many of today's pianists can leave you cold and dispirited, the reverse is true of the second two-disc volume of Artur Pizarro's Rachmaninov

cycle. Here you are invited to reconsider the true innermost nature of Rachmaninov's genius. Refusing to grandstand, Pizarro leaves visceral virtuosity and nerve-storms to others aware only of a dark, melancholy, all-Russian introspection beneath the surface of so much outsize Romantic rhetoric. And if such a determinedly held viewpoint produces mixed results, they are rarely less than thought-provoking.

Myra Hess, alarmed by so many up-and-coming speed merchants, would surely have admired Pizarro's lack of histrionics or wildness. Yet she might also have noted that, on the debit side, there are many moments in, say, Preludes Nos 5, 7 and 8 from Op 23, where the playing sounds tired and lethargic. Generally, Pizarro is at his finest in the most interior numbers and hearing him in the darkness of, say, the second B flat minor Prelude from Op 32 makes you realise the absurdity of an early *Grove's Dictionary* verdict that 'Rachmaninov is too cosmopolitan in idiom to be of lasting significance'. He is hauntingly warm and caressing in the G major Prelude from the same set, but why so slow and turgid in the gently syncopated *allegretto* of No 11? Here I found myself longing for Moura Lympany's naturalness, her 'delicate emotional fervour' (in her second

recording of the Preludes on both Decca and Testament).

In the florid and uneven *Chopin* Variations (though Var 21 is as beautiful as anything in Rachmaninov), Pizarro once more opts for gentleness rather than aplomb, though, surprisingly, he chooses Rachmaninov's virtuoso rather than tranquil end. You will look elsewhere for greater conformity and ardour. Pizarro may not be everyone's cup of tea (or glass of vodka) but at his best he is both courageous and poetic. Odradek's sound is warm and, like the performances, avoids anything over-sharp or brilliant. **Bryce Morrison**

Sibelius

Andantino, JS44. Allegretto, JS18. Largo, JS117.

Impromptu, Op 5 - No 2; No 5. Ten Pieces, Op 24 - Caprice; Romance. Finlandia, Op 26. Musette, Op 27 No 3. Polka, 'Aino'. Valse triste, Op 44 No 1. Pan and Echo, Op 53. Rondino, Op 68 No 1. The Spruce, Op 75 No 5. Thirteen Pieces, Op 76 - Etude; Arabesque; Elegiac; Capricciotto; Harlequinade. Five Pieces, 'The Flowers', Op 85. Two Pieces for Oscar Parviainen. Eight Short Pieces, Op 99 - Souvenir; Moment de valse. Scène romantique, Op 101 No 5. The Village Church, Op 103 No 1. Landscape II

Folke Gräsbeck *pf*

BIS (C) BIS2132 (81' • DDD)

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FLYING THE FLAG FOR YOUNG MUSICAL TALENT



Sibelius's Steinway grand was a gift from a large cohort of his supporters on his 50th

birthday in 1915. That means it was the instrument on which he would have tried out passages from his Sixth and Seventh symphonies as well as other late works (Andrew Barnett's helpful essay points out that he did most of his composing at his desk). It also means that only the second half of the 31 tracks on this more than generously filled disc was composed at the time he owned the instrument. Not that this is a worry, given the attractively woody quality of the piano, the sensitivity with which Folke Gräsbeck handles it and his judicious selection of repertoire from a time-span of more than 40 years. Anyone interested in Sibelius's complete piano works can easily turn to BIS's Sibelius edition; but for a single-disc survey, why not hear them on an instrument of the day rather than a more modern specimen built for the kind of concert-hall projection that is irrelevant to most of the music?

Highlights for me would be the cascades of the B minor Impromptu from Op 5, the introspective and likewise rather Lisztian G sharp minor Rondino, Op 68 No 1, the Griegian 'Souvenir' from Op 99 and the enigmatic *Landscape II* from the time when Sibelius would have been wrestling with the Eighth Symphony he eventually destroyed. But then there's also the storm and stress of the *Finlandia* transcription, where it's hard not to imagine the composer regaling friends and colleagues before public performance. This and the *Valse triste* apart, there may not be much here that shows Sibelius at his most personal. But it is still a disc to treasure. **David Fanning**

Sweelinck

Psalm 23, 'Mein Hüter und mein Hirt'. Puer nobis nascitur. Ich fuhr mich über Rheine (Ick voer al over Rhijn). Fantasia re re re sol ut mi fa sol. Toccata primi toni (d2). Mein Junges Leben hat ein Endt. Pavana hispanica. Von der Fortuna werd ich getrieben. Soll es sein. Paduana lachrymae. Christe qui lux est dies. Pavan Philippi. Malle Sijmen. Fantasia a 3 (g2)

Sébastien Wonne hpd

K617 © K617 247 (75' • DDD)



Discs of Sweelinck's keyboard music are still surprisingly uncommon. Robert

Woolley has made a fine if unhurried start on working through it on organ and harpsichord for Chandos (10/03 and 6/09), and there are a few other recordings here and there, but hardly enough to make this recital from French harpsichordist Sébastien Wonne seem surplus to requirement. Playing on a copy of a 1612 Ruckers harpsichord hybridised by the addition of a four-foot register, Wonne selects works from the contrapuntally spun repertoire normally associated with the organ – settings of psalm-tones, hymns and other polyphonic pieces – to put alongside the flamboyantly intricate variation sets, toccatas and fantasias more obviously intended for the harpsichord. The result is pleasingly varied and pleasingly international too, wafting in through our Amsterdam window strains of Germany, Spain, Italy and above all England, whose master composers of the virginalists' school (John Bull and Peter Philips especially) leave the strongest stylistic imprint. That's not to say that Sweelinck does not have a powerful identity of his own. Far from it. Here is a master of expressive counterpoint and harmony; listen to the tensile power of the contrary-motion opening of *Toccata primi toni* or the way inner parts direct the ebb and flow of the variations in the beautiful *Mein Junges Leben hat ein Endt* and *Ick voer al over Rhijn*, thus allowing them to be so much more than exercises in virtuoso pattern-spinning.

Wonne's playing is on the whole flexible, intelligent and sensitive to the music's lyrical and contrapuntal contouring. He could have done more to characterise individual variations in *Mein Junges Leben* but establishes a rolling momentum in *Pavana hispanica*, and in general succeeds in conjuring the distinctive musical personality of Sweelinck – serious, complex and eloquent, even when the semiquavers are flying. The harpsichord is characterful and wonderfully clear-textured, though perhaps a little unyielding in full registration. The four-foot register gets a little outing on its own in *Malle Sijmen*, delightfully.

Lindsay Kemp

Ustvolskaya

'The Precise Music of Galina Ustvolskaya'

A film by Alexandre Bragé

Piano Sonatas – No 1^a; No 2^b;

No 3^c; No 4^d; No 5^e; No 6^f

^aAlexei Grotz, ^eVladimir Ivanov,

^fAlexei Lubimov, ^dElizaveta Miller,

^aOlga Pashchenko, ^bKsenia Semenova pfs

Wergo © DVD MV0810-5

(73' • PAL • 16:9 • Stereo • 0)

Recorded live at the School of Dramatic Arts, Moscow, March 7, 2011



Sabine Liebner on the Neos label is the place to go if you're after a complete cycle of

Galina Ustvolskaya's piano sonatas (and Marianne Schroeder on hat[now]ART is top-notch too). This DVD, however, serves up a stimulating alternative – the six sonatas performed by six different pianists, recorded live at Moscow's School of Dramatic Arts in 2011, with Alexandre Bragé's intimate camerawork reminding you of both the brute physicality and the very specific technique required to play Ustvolskaya's music.

This Ustvolskaya marathon was organised by the Russian pianist Alexei Lubimov. Five of his students – Olga Pashchenko, Ksenia Semenova, Alexei Grotz, Elizaveta Miller and Vladimir Ivanov – performed the first five sonatas, then Lubimov himself took to the stage for the sixth, and in his booklet-notes he suggests that the design of the stage in the Globe Hall felt satisfyingly appropriate. The stillness of the central stage, surrounded by three tiers of seats, encased within eight boundary walls, took the audience to 'the very centre of Ustvolskaya's sound laboratory', he tells us.

The cramped acoustics of the space, Lubimov says, concentrate the sounds and 'carry them upwards' – a sonic claustrophobia that has been retained on DVD. The clangorous motor rhythms of the First Sonata's opening movement clatter against your skull, then the fragmenting third movement – a disembodied chorale that topples into itself – tiptoes past your ears. Alexei Grotz's performance of the manic, obsessive Third Sonata is masterful. Grotz sculpts a mighty dialogue between smashed-up scalic patterns and cushioning chorales, while managing to carry Ustvolskaya's layered and rather idealistic dynamics: *fff* rubbing against *pp*.

Vladimir Ivanov's performance of the Fifth Sonata creates an aural illusion that the note D flat, which is sustained through the piece, is functioning like an inverse tonic, anything that comes into its orbit made to bounce back into harmonic space like a pinball. And Lubimov's own performance of the Sixth Sonata fights for a granite beauty within Ustvolskaya's monodies and clusters, persuading us to listen in a new way. **Philip Clark**

Selected comparisons:

Liebner (NEOS) NEOS10904/5

Schroeder (HATH) HATN179

Jorge Bolet

'Vol 2: Ambassador from the Golden Age'

Piano works by **Albéniz, JS Bach, Bizet,**

Brahms, Chasins, Chopin, Debussy, Franck, Godowsky, Grieg, Haydn, Liszt, Mendelssohn, Moszkowski, Mozart, Rachmaninov, Rameau, Saint-Saëns, Schubert, J Strauss II, R Strauss, Tchaikovsky, Voříšek, Wagner and Weber

Marston © 56003-2 (7h 55' • ADD/DDD)

Recorded 1937-89



This astonishing six-disc tribute to Jorge Bolet, taken from concerts dating

from 1937-89 and from a variety of locations, requires a book rather than a review. In such cases lack of space is always the enemy. Astonishing, because it entails a seismic leap in perception. For here Bolet emerges in performances which are like the blaze of Valhalla, a magnificence hard to relate to Decca's late *réclame*. There, desperate to achieve an acclaim that tragically eluded him for most of his life, he went against his own grain and opted for a 'correct' and polished refinement that would accord more easily with the limited taste of the time. Here, on the other hand, is the pianist lauded by Gilels, Abbey Simon and Alicia de Larrocha. That dour and unsmiling platform manner ('well, I'm not Liberace') gives way to a sheer joy in performance, a sharing with his audience his love for composers drawn from a vast repertoire focused chiefly on the Romantics. Again, Bolet's greatness was the reverse of showmanship. Never for a moment do you sense him wondering 'what shall I do with this?' For him the composer's voice was paramount, his character proclaimed in an epic virtuosity that had few equals.

From the general to the particular. No pianist is uniformly successful in everything. But if you consider how Bolet keeps drama at arm's length in Beethoven's *Tempest* Sonata, you also recall a superb and riotous sense of homecoming in the finale of the *Les adieux* Sonata. His D major Toccata, too, reminds you that he was a superb pianist in Bach pure and simple as well as Romantically hyphenated. His Debussy may be less subtle or acute than Gieseking's but *Feux d'artifice* is given that 'blow your socks off' treatment so unlike his later Decca reading.

Elsewhere there is glory after glory, and never more so than in Franck's *Prelude, Aria and Finale*, characterised by storming eloquence and emotional fervour that makes critically acknowledged recordings by Hough, Perahia and even the great Cortot fade.

Liszt was always central to Bolet's repertoire, and in both the *Lucia* and *Rigoletto* paraphrases you are left to wonder at cadenzas spun off like stardust and a singing melodic line to enthrall even the most ardent opera lover. In the Second Ballade, the waves roll in sombre magnificence. His Chopin F minor Fantaisie erupts from darkest introspection into brilliant fury; and if the outer sections of the Op 25 No 5 Etude are 'almost too serious', the middle section is memorably 'sung' and glittering. His F sharp minor Nocturne, too, is touched with a sense of elegy, a haunting contrast to, say, Rubinstein's patrician glide.

Then there is Godowsky, another potent Bolet speciality with a performance of the Study after Chopin's Op 10 No 1 to make you gasp. His way, too with Schläzer's finger-twisting Etude is a fleet and lavish alternative to the stately and Churchillian version on Decca; also to Eileen Joyce's legendary dry-ice sparkle. Other virtuoso delights come from Abram Chasins (Bolet's one-time coach), scintillating gewgaws that locate Bolet's smile beneath an outward frown. Finally, Mozart-Liszt and Wagner-Liszt, and a reminder once more of Bolet's greatness, confirmation of a glowing and volatile personality now revealed beneath a reclusive and withdrawn personality.

There are photographs of Bolet at all stages of his life, from shy teenager to army private ('Private Bolet as you never knew me'), to imperious master. My heartfelt gratitude to Ward Marston for such unremitting dedication to his cause.

Bryce Morrison

Liza Ferschtman

JS Bach Solo Violin Partita No 2, BWV1004

Bartók Solo Violin Sonata, Sz117 **Berio**

Sequenza VIII **Biber** Passacaglia, 'Guardian Angel'

Liza Ferschtman *vn*

Challenge Classics ©  CC72635 (78' • DDD/DSD)

'Soli'

Bartók Solo Violin Sonata, Sz117 **G Benjamin**

Three Miniatures **Carter** Four Lauds - Statement:

Remembering Aaron; Rhapsodic Musings

Kurtág Six Miniatures **Penderecki** Cadenza

Tamsin Waley-Cohen *vn*

Signum © SIGCD416 (77' • DDD)



These two recitals have the Bartók Sonata as an important constituent but their focus is quite different. With Liza Ferschtman it's a balanced programme that places

Baroque music alongside 20th-century works; for Tamsin Waley-Cohen it's the starting point for a survey of more recent solo violin music. Ferschtman gives a lively and very individual performance of the Bartók, often quite free in rhythm, but with a good sense of momentum whenever the music demands it, as in the more forceful parts of the finale. In the 'Melodia', she keeps to many of the fingerings from the Menuhin edition, making effective use of the expressive *portamentos* he indicates. It's a fine account, though it doesn't quite displace Barnabás Kelemen's wonderful 2010 recording, apparently effortless yet utterly gripping.

Waley-Cohen's way with the Sonata is quite different: each of the movements is slower – way behind Bartók's very precise timings, especially in the first movement, (14'12" as against 8'45"). Consequently the characteristic chaconne-like rhythms that pervade the movement lose their powerful force. The 'Fuga', too, appears effortful next to Ferschtman or Kelemen.

But if Waley-Cohen's Bartók can hardly be recommended, the rest of her recital is a different matter. The programme provides a fascinating survey of solo violin music of the last 25 years and her playing, often forceful and uncompromising – at the climax of the Penderecki, in the Benjamin Canon and in the second Carter piece – carries real conviction. The more delicate pieces, for instance the lovely Benjamin 'Lauer Lied', are just as persuasive and her adoption of Hungarian improvisatory style in Kurtág's 'In nomine all'ungarese' conveys a strong sense of enjoyment.

Ferschtman's programme is clearly planned so that each piece illuminates its companions, and is satisfyingly framed by the Biber Passacaglia and the Bach Chaconne. The Bartók continues and elaborates Biber's G minor sonorities and we can hear how Berio takes a stage further the insistent tension we find in the Bartók. As to the performances, the Berio is suitably uncompromising at the start and wonderfully dextrous in the quick passagework. And the two earlier works demonstrate a thorough familiarity with the demands of Baroque style: each of the dances in the Bach Partita has a strong and appropriate rhythmic character. The challenge of the Chaconne is met with great confidence – I was especially impressed by the cumulative effect of the long *arpeggiando* passage before the turn to D major and by Ferschtman's finely expressive phrasing when the music returns to the minor mode. **Duncan Druce**

Bartók – selected comparison:

Kelemen (5/13) (HUNG) HSACD32515



Liza Ferschtman, who offers a balance of 20th-century and Baroque works on her new disc of solo violin music for Challenge Classics

'Capriccioso'

J-L Duport Etude No 7, Allegro **J-P Duport** Etude No 8, Adagio cantabile **Piatti** Twelve Caprices, Op 25. Capriccio sopra un tema della Niobe di Pacini, Op 21 **Popper** Etude No 29

Antonio Meneses VC
Avie © AV2328 (69' • DDD)



The cello has never drawn the same crowds as the violin or piano – otherwise the cellist-composers on this recording of Brazilian virtuoso Antonio Meneses may have been lauded as Paganinis or Godowskys. Instead, it takes retrospective recordings such as this to pull together the likes of Alfredo Piatti, the Duport brothers and David Popper, and place them in a similar perspective.

Although his depth of tone and colour makes Meneses's survey an excellent reference, the glittering collection of 12 Caprices by Piatti are done greatest justice when listened to as a set – both as a study in the different surprises of the caprice, and as the varied and blithely changeable collection of faces that Meneses shows them to be. His performance is informed by the same spirit as the contrasting and thoughtful Ysaÿe

unaccompanied violin sonatas, and creates music out of studies in virtuosity that is a perennial challenge for all musicians. His many facets as a musician have been emblazoned across his commanding recording of the Bach Suites and the poetic phrasing in his Haydn: here, though, at the same time as concentrating purely on the issue of virtuosity and works written for the cello by cellists, he manages to maintain a thoughtful elegance and unfussy control that brings out the innate beauty of the music at the same time as displaying the multifarious elements of his own artistry. **Caroline Gill**

'Concord'

Ives Piano Sonata No 2, 'Concord, Mass, 1840-60' **Webern** Piano Variations, Op 27
Berg Piano Sonata Op 1

Alexei Lubimov pf
Zig-Zag Territoires © ZTZ362 (61' • DDD)



Pairing Ives with Second Viennese School composers is not usually the done thing. All the more reason then to attempt a coalition between American idealism and Viennese cool, especially if you're Alexei Lubimov, who risked life and limb during

the Soviet era by performing Schoenberg, Boulez and Stockhausen.

I wish I could be more enthusiastic about his new disc. Logic binds the programme together: as Webern was writing his Variations in 1936, John Kirkpatrick was readying himself to premiere Ives's *Concord* Sonata two years later, and the questioning but ordered tonality of Berg's Piano Sonata acts as a well-chosen harmonic buffer. The Ives was recorded live in 1997 and the sound is clear if one-dimensional – more than can be said for the Webern and Berg, recorded in '99, performances fatally undermined by unusually distracting audience noise.

Philip Mead's recording had an easy win in my *Concord* Sonata Collection (11/12) because Mead felt in unique communion with Ives's architectural whimsy: structures colliding, fusing, crumbling as they are forming. But Lubimov's earlier performance from 1995 (recorded at IRCAM!) ran him a close second, and what a pity that this performance should feel so correct and blandly chivalrous in comparison. The notes are no problem – in 'The Alcotts' Lubimov punches out those harmonically incongruous grace notes like he means business – but elsewhere there's a tendency to smooth over moments of rupture, to tame the *Concord* beast. Mead ingests the detail of Ives's score to the point where spontaneity

rules; Lubimov's performance has settled into 9-to-5 routine. No ad lib viola here, but Marianne Henkel makes a decent job of the flute cameo in 'Thoreau' – albeit lacking the momentous anti-momentum of a structure winding itself down that Lubimov achieved in 1995. **Philip Clark**

'Moldau'

Dvořák American Suite, Op 98 B184 **Glinka** Nocturne **Khachaturian** Oriental dance. Toccata **Lyadov** A Musical Snuffbox, Op 32 **Liszt** Le rossignol, S250 No 1 **Prokofiev** Romeo and Juliet – Morning Serenade; Montagues And Capulets **Smetana** Má vlast – Vltava **Tchaikovsky** The Nutcracker – Dance of the Sugar Plum Fairy **Walter-Kühne** Fantasy on Themes from Tchaikovsky's 'Eugene Onegin', Op 81 **Xavier de Maistre** hp
Sony Classical © 88875 04904-2 (61' • DDD)



Xavier de Maistre last graced these pages in October 2013 with a stunning disc of

Mozart. His performance of the Piano Concerto K459 sticks in the memory. His new disc is a solo recital bound by a common Slavic element. It opens with 'Vltava' from *Má vlast*, the first of several 'how does he do it?' transcriptions, this one by Hans Trneček (1858-1914). He follows this with Henriette Renié's transcription of Liszt's transcription of Alyabyev's 'Le rossignol', a once-popular piano encore. Halfway through comes the now ubiquitous *Fantasy on Themes from 'Eugene Onegin'* by Ekaterina Walter-Kühne. De Maistre is a kind of Hamelin of the harp: the agility, the ease with which the most astonishing technical challenges are surmounted, the conversational phrasing and evenness of rapid passagework instantly amaze. But it is also his depth of tone and variety of colour that beguile.

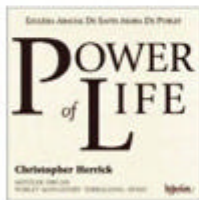
Yet something doesn't quite work. A succession of virtuoso showpieces offers diminishing musical returns: despite the artist's assertion that this album 'includes rather more rough edges' than earlier albums in his quest to 'provide a more faithful account of all the colours and contrasts I was keen to recreate', everything is so peerlessly executed that it is hard not to believe one is listening to some fabulous musical automaton. 'Montagues and Capulets' lacks essential pomp and bluster; there is more fun to be had, surely, from Lyadov's *Musical Snuffbox*; and Dvořák's *American Suite* gains nothing by being transferred from the piano. The exception is Glinka's Nocturne, which de Maistre invests with exquisite tenderness and which, tellingly, is the only

harp original of the programme. Superb recorded sound. **Jeremy Nicholas**

'Power of Life'

Dupré Ave maris stella **Monnikendam** Toccata No 2 **Mozart** Andante and Variations, K501 **Petrali** Allegro festoso **Saint-Saëns** Rhapsodie sur des cantiques bretons, Op 7 No 3 **Shearing** Amazing Grace **Stamm** Rapsodia alla latina **Takle** Power of Life **Villa-Lobos** Bachianas Brasileiras No 5 – Aria (Cantilena) **F Wagner** Trionfo della vita, Op 76 **Walton** Orb and Sceptre **Warlock** Capriol Suite – Pieds-en-l'air **Christopher Herrick** org

Hyperion © CDA68129 (67' • DDD). Played on the Metzler organ of Poblet Monastery, Tarragona, Spain



It may not go under the title of 'Organ Fireworks' but this latest offering from

Christopher Herrick has all the usual ingredients. It features a tremendous instrument and a programme combining tantalising rarities (the title piece by Mons Leidvin Takle is not the best of these, while Dupré's *Ave maris stella* sounds like a trial run for his Op 20 Variations) with exuberant transcriptions (including William McKie's splendid retelling of Walton's *Orb and Sceptre*), local flavour (Hans-André Stamm's flamenco *Rapsodia alla latina*) and one or two hidden gems (what a superb piece of organ music Mozart's K501 makes).

Herrick has no hesitation in setting the stringy reeds of the chamade-only Batalla manual ablaze, while a Zimbelstern intermittently waved across the face of Saint-Saëns's *Rhapsodie sur des cantiques bretons* has more the character of a lit sparkler than a tinkling of tiny bells. Add to this Herrick's brisk speeds and a refusal to indulge in the sentimentality of George Shearing's lovely take on *Amazing Grace* or Warlock's 'Pieds-en-l'air', and the disc has the high-octane feel of a full-blown fireworks party. There is more than enough here to excite anyone with a taste for spectacular organ pyrotechnics.

Something, however, holds me back from recommending it unreservedly. Do I detect the merest whiff of sloppiness in the recording? A rather sour aftertaste is left as Franz Wagner's *Trionfo della vita* drifts away into the acoustic smoke, and there is a definite wobble as Petrali's outrageous *Allegro festoso* is extinguished. Add to this an unenticing booklet and Herrick's own factual but impersonal notes, and the impression is of something put together a little too hastily to match the supreme quality of the 'Organ Fireworks' discs. **Marc Rochester**

'The Steinmeyer Organ in Nidaros Cathedral'

Draagen Improvisation on a Folk Tune from Hornindal **Dubois** Douze Pièces nouvelles – In Paradisum **Dupré** Tombeau de Titelouze, Op 38 – Placare Christe servulis **Eben** Sonntagsmusik – Moto ostinato **Gigout** Six Pièces – Grand chœur dialogué **Grieg** Peer Gynt, Op 46 – Morning **Handel** Water Music, HWV348 – Hornpipe **Hovland** Toccata over Kjærlighet er lysets kilde **Howells** Six Pieces – Master Tallis's Testament **Karg-Elert** Hommage à Handel, Op 75b **L Nielsen** Organ Fantasy, 'Nidarosdomens klokke' **Reger** Zwölf Stücke, Op 59 – Benedictus **Sandvold** Adagio, Op 9 **Widor** Conte d'avril, Op 64 – Marche nuptiale **Magne H Draagen** org
LAWO Classics © LWC1075 (80' • DDD/DSO)



With a specification that runs to 146 stops and an amazing 36 couplers, the 1930

Steinmeyer organ in Trondheim is one of the largest cathedral organs in Europe. It was substantially rebuilt a year ago, a few months after the appointment of Magne Draagen as Director of Music. He demonstrates the instrument in a programme highlighting various unique features, to which he draws attention in his own booklet-notes.

The recording does him proud, capturing the almost inaudible Echo division in Ludwig Nielsen's otherwise unremarkable Organ Fantasy based on the Nidaros Cathedral chimes, vividly detailing the broad dynamic sweep of Reger's 'Benedictus' and capturing the climax of Dupré's 'Placare Christe servulis' with ground-shaking intensity. Draagen can be excused for bringing certain stops and features out to play more for reasons of aural display than musical integrity; Widor's 'Marche nuptiale' gets a burst of the harp-like Celesta for no good reason; pedal chimes and a host of mutations go even beyond Karg-Elert's registration directions in the astonishing *Hommage to Handel*; a strangely distant Tuba makes its presence felt in the Handel Hornpipe; and, perversely, the English Solo division with Willis pipework is highlighted in Gigout's *Grand chœur dialogué*.

With so much aural colour to play with, Draagen's own improvisation shows remarkable restraint in its Grieg-like 3'40", while in Eben's 'Moto ostinato', the lovely *Adagio* by Arild Sandvold and, particularly, a discreet account of 'Master Tallis's Testament' we hear this fine organ and intelligent player at their very best.

Marc Rochester

GRAMOPHONE *Collector*

PIANO TRANSCRIPTIONS

Jeremy Nicholas listens to five discs of reimaginings of earlier music by pianist-composers ranging from Liszt to Escaich



Swiss pianist Beatrice Berrut, who 'ravishes the ear' in her programme of Bach transcriptions on Safran

Liszt's transcription of all nine Beethoven symphonies is surely one of the greatest altruistic acts in music history. His remarkably faithful arrangements appeal on several levels: their pianistic ingenuity, the light they shed on the originals, and the musical and technical challenges they present to the pianist. There have been several recordings of the complete set but none, I think, on a period instrument. In this fourth volume of his series, **Yury Martynov** plays Symphonies Nos 4 and 5 on a restored 1867 Blüthner, rich in tone and piquant colours. I don't mind that some of the bass-lines are not as crisply delineated as you would expect on a modern grand: Martynov's performances have all the vigour and verve of a live recording, the drama and musical argument intensified by his knack of pushing forwards with leading phrases, alive to the full dynamic range of the Blüthner.

It's ironic that Wagner, though he composed at the piano, produced such feeble original works for the instrument while providing such glorious material for myriad pianist-composers. Liszt makes two contributions to a disc of Wagner transcriptions from the young Dutch pianist **Camiel Boomsma**. Isolde's Liebestod makes its inevitable appearance, here preceded by Zoltán Kocsis's resourceful transcription of the Prelude to *Tristan und Isolde*. The prevailing mood is subdued and sombre, with the Transformation Music

from Act 1 of *Parsifal* (transcr August Stradal), Busoni's take on the Funeral March from *Götterdämmerung* and the Improvisation on Walther's Prize Song from *Die Meistersinger* by Franz Bendel, a piece that graces the first pages of my childhood *Salon Piano Album* ('63 Popular Piano Solos', published by Bayley & Ferguson, price 1 shilling). I never thought to hear it on disc. It is fairly unremarkable, as are these performances. Boomsma has a lovely touch and a sensitive ear but remains emotionally constrained and studio-bound throughout.

A pianist with a more distinctive personality is the Canadian **Avan Yu**, winner of the 2012 Sydney International Piano Competition, rewarded with a disc in Naxos's Laureate Series. His programme of Schubert songs transcribed by Liszt has eight of the 12 numbers from *Winterreise* (Liszt never got round to transcribing the remaining 12 of the cycle) and 10 of the 14 numbers from *Schwanengesang* (it would have made more sense had Yu recorded the remaining four). There is much delightful playing here, not least a heartfelt 'Ständchen' and a notably jaunty 'Abschied', which makes one want to hear more of this promising young artist.

If Liszt is, at times, too interventionist in Schubert ('Gute Nacht', for example), he is fidelity itself in the six Bach organ Preludes and Fugues, BWV543-48, he transcribed for piano. The second of

these in Liszt's ordering (S462) is the grand C major work – at least, it should be grand. In the hands of **Angelika Nebel** it emerges as a simpering ghost with no hint of its origins. The remaining 15 titles are played in much the same manner, trotted out with little power, character or dynamic variation. Kabalevsky's arrangement of the spurious Prelude and Fugue in G minor, BWV558, is hopelessly slack. It's a shame, because the programme is one that repertoire junkies might have jumped at, for few of the many Bach transcriptions discs available feature hyphenated Kuhlstrom, Zabel, Pauer, Szántó or Whittaker, not to mention the extravagantly monickered Wagner Stefani d'Aragona Malheiro Prado and William Murdoch (his *In dulce jubilo*, BWV729, is heard here but without the 'jubilo' bit).

A second disc of Bach transcriptions offers playing of a quite different order. On 'Lux aeterna – Visions of Bach', the Swiss pianist **Beatrice Berrut** ravishes the ear with the help of a superb Bösendorfer and first-rate recording in a programme of (mainly) Bach-Busoni. At its centre are all 10 (for once) of his organ Chorale Prelude transcriptions, with exemplary voicing in *Wachet auf* and joyful exuberance in *Nun freut euch, lieben Christen g'mein*. Preceding these are the mighty Chaconne, magnificent and richly resonant in Berrut's hands, Kempff's arrangement of the Siciliano from BWV1031 (up there with Lipatti's account) and – truly touching – the ubiquitous Aria from BWV1004 in Siloti's version. This outstanding release ends with a 'veiled tribute to Bach' (Berrut) in the form of Thierry Escaich's 2008 virtuoso *Trois Etudes baroques* and *Jeux de doubles*. Great fun. Highly recommended. **G**

THE RECORDINGS



Beethoven Syms Nos 4 & 5
(transcr Liszt) **Yury Martynov**
Zig-Zag Territoires © ZZT356



Wagner Transcrs for Pf
Camiel Boomsma
Etcetera © KTC1500



Liszt Schubert Song Transcrs
Avan Yu
Naxos © 8 573349



Bach 'Illuminations'
Angelika Nebel
Hänssler Classic © CD98 041



Bach. Escaich 'Lux aeterna'
Beatrice Berrut
Safran © AP100

Esa-Pekka Salonen

A powerful understanding of the symphony orchestra makes the Finnish conductor an inspiring composer, finds **Arnold Whittall**

‘Conductor and composer’ is the label frequently applied to Esa-Pekka Salonen – whereas ‘composer and conductor’ is usually given to the likes of George Benjamin or Thomas Adès. In the volatile world of contemporary music, such verbal nuances are inescapable. Many would-be full-time composers become performers or teachers simply to make ends meet, and some of them prove talented enough to be rather more in demand for their conducting – of all kinds of music – than for their compositions. Those who regret the imbalance have tough choices to make, and it is often assumed that composer-conductors who write relatively little music – Pierre Boulez and Oliver Knussen are the ‘classic’ cases – have compounded the difficulty by accepting so many conducting engagements. Maybe conductor-composers are, by definition, less conflicted than composer-conductors: and – with orchestras readily to hand – they might also be more fortunate than those non-conducting composers who find it difficult to initiate performances of their own music.

‘Multi-talented’ is another label that fits Esa-Pekka Salonen. Born in 1958, he started out by specialising in performance (French horn) at Helsinki’s Sibelius Academy, and his *Horn Music 1* (1976) shows the 18-year-old student composer cheerfully covering (and just possibly sending up) a wide

‘He relishes the virtuosity, sonic variety and the sheer opulence available from the best present-day symphony orchestras’

range of stylistic and technical models. More evidence of needing to kick over the traces emerged in 1977 when Salonen co-founded an experimental music group called Korvat auki (‘Ears Open’) with, among others, Kaija Saariaho and Magnus Lindberg. Over the next two years he studied both composition (with Rautavaara) and conducting, and it was a successful debut engagement with the Finnish RSO in 1979 that set him on a different professional path to star-composers Saariaho and Lindberg. Salonen was also involved with the Finnish Avanti Chamber Orchestra, and the still-strong impact of early pieces like the winningly irreverent *Floof* (1982, rev 1990) and the edgy yet eloquent *Concerto for Alto Saxophone and Orchestra* (1980) owes much to Avanti’s flair and enthusiasm, as well as to Salonen’s contact with Italian composers Franco Donatoni and Niccolò Castiglioni.

As a performer, Salonen has certainly retained his early interest in the new and the quirky, though much



An orchestral ‘insider’: Esa-Pekka Salonen, who fronted Apple’s 2014 iPad Air ads

of his time inevitably requires engagement with the mainstream repertoire: at his London debut with the Philharmonia in 1983 he conducted Mahler’s Third Symphony. Nevertheless, although his recordings include pre-1900 music, they give particular emphasis to leading 20th-century figures, from Sibelius and Stravinsky to Messiaen and Lutosławski. As for his own compositions, these are very much the work of an orchestral ‘insider’, relishing the virtuosity, sonic variety and the sheer opulence available from the best present-day symphony orchestras – qualities which must be especially potent for conductors, who are unusually close to those sounds in rehearsal and performance.

Like Lindberg and Saariaho, Salonen was a student at a time when classical music was increasingly split between composers seeking to sustain some commitment to the radical progressiveness that had seemed essential to the Boulez-Stockhausen generation and those – both older and younger – who were promoting alternatives: minimalism, ‘new’ Romanticism, varieties of experimentalism. In this euphoric post-1980 era of diversity and instability, the surreal, comically macabre world of Ligeti often seemed even more liberating than the more extreme enterprises of a John Cage or a Steve Reich, especially when combined with an innovative approach to new electronic possibilities. The earliest compositions of Salonen which survive were very directly geared to the ethos of his Finnish Korvat auki and Avanti colleagues: but by the early 1980s he was already thinking orchestrally, and to this extent laying the foundations for the



SALONEN FACTS

Born Helsinki, Finland,
June 30, 1958

Education Studied French horn at Helsinki's Sibelius Academy (1973-7), also composing (with Rautavaara) and conducting. Attended courses at Siena and Darmstadt.

Career Conductor of Swedish RSO (1985-94); Principal Guest Conductor of Philharmonia Orchestra (1985-95); Music Director of LA Philharmonic (1992-2009); Principal Conductor and Artistic Advisor of Philharmonia Orchestra (from 2008); Creative Chair of Tonhalle Orchestra Zurich (2014-15).

Landmarks in composition


Floof was a prize-winner at the 1992 Unesco International Rostrum for Composers; *Wing on Wing* (2004) opened Frank Gehry's Walt Disney Concert Hall, the new home of the LAPO; the Violin Concerto (2009) won the Grawemeyer Award (2012).

Credo 'Music leads a physical rather than an intellectual or mental existence...The whole point is to write exactly the way you want to write music and not give a damn about whether this is acceptable to the establishment.'

more mainstream qualities of the music that have followed, reflecting his close working relationships with – in particular – the Philharmonia in London and the Philharmonic in Los Angeles.

Salonen's titles often suggest that he has remained attached to the kind of extravagance and relish for the challengingly surreal that burst out in *Floof* – none more so than *Mania*, a 17-minute concerto for cello and chamber ensemble (2000), or the compulsively restless and agitated textures of the 21-minute orchestral tone-poem *Insomnia* (2002). Comparable qualities of the strange, the feverishly sinister, emerge in a more recent tone-poem *Nyx* (2010) which seems to focus on images of darkness ('Nyx' is the mythic embodiment of night and all its associated aspects, including both sleep and death). Another favoured image is of the spiral; the orchestral compositions *Giro* (1981, rev 1997) and *Helix* (2005) seize on the possibilities offered by intertwining lines that move through space and time with insistent energy. Salonen has no difficulty in writing genuinely fast, fluently mobile music, and his avoidance of much that might have associated his music more directly with the fractured and darkly mordant expressionism of Schoenberg, Xenakis or Kurtág has led to him being labelled a 'postmodern impressionist'. The one work that references Schoenberg directly – the solo violin piece *Lachen Verlernt* (2002) – could even involve a heartfelt lament for the 'loss of laughter', and of all 'lightness of being', that this phrase from Schoenberg's *Pierrot lunaire* describes.

Salonen's music has many links with the opulent world of late Romanticism – Scriabin, Szymanowski, Dukas. His explicit concern with continuity might also appear, in essence, anti-modernist. At the same time, however, his music's elaboration of harmonic character builds bridges, not just to Saariaho and Lindberg, but to such resourcefully late-modernist orchestral composers as Tristan Murail and Thomas Adès. A simpler Salonen score like the riveting *Five Images after Sappho* for soprano and chamber ensemble (1999) has a modal transparency that makes it more immediately approachable than some of his denser, more extended works: and listeners unfamiliar with the larger pieces might also find the relatively restricted soundscape of the two-movement *Dichotomie* for solo piano (2000) a useful introduction to the virtuoso elaboration and energetic rhythmic structuring that governs so much of his compositional output. Yet, Salonen seems to feel most at home with the more conflicted responses to those still-relevant late-Romantic qualities that emerge most productively when extended density is possible.

As it happens, his two major concertos, for piano and violin, reveal radically different formal responses to the symphonic conventions of the Romantic concerto from Mendelssohn to Rachmaninov. While the Piano Concerto (2007) has the traditional three movements – called simply Movements 1, 2 and 3 – and the Violin Concerto (2009) has four more programmatically titled sections – Mirage, Pulse 1, Pulse 2, Adieu – both root vital aspects of their personal identities in the exploration of what, in connection with the Piano Concerto, Salonen terms 'an existential need of folklore'. How apposite, then, is Susanna Välimäki's liner-note description of the Violin Concerto's third section as music that 'dances and swings like a folk band from an alien planet.' These concertos, and other orchestral spectaculars like *LA Variations* (1996) and *Foreign Bodies* (2001), paint the most vivid picture of Salonen's still-evolving profile as a composer, and could well provide the impetus for further creative work in the years to come – work for which he is increasingly in demand. 

RECOMMENDED RECORDINGS

Three recordings of Salonen conducted by Salonen



Wing on Wing. Foreign Bodies. Insomnia

Anu and Pia Komsa *sops* Finnish RSO / Salonen

DG Ⓢ 477 5375 (7/05)

Though made in Finland rather than California, this disc offers a vivid memento of the music Salonen was writing at the time that Walt Disney Concert Hall was inaugurated.



Helix. Piano Concerto. Dichotomie

Yefim Bronfman *pf* LA PO / Salonen

DG Ⓢ 477 8103 (3/09)

The Piano Concerto is full of echoes from the past that are transformed into a distinctive, strikingly contemporary sound world.



Violin Concerto. Nyx

Leila Josefowicz *vn* Finnish RSO / Salonen

DG Ⓢ 479 0628GH (1/13)

The Grawemeyer Award-winning Violin Concerto (2009) is coupled with an equally spectacular orchestral showpiece, *Nyx*, written in 2010.

Vocal



Fabrice Fitch welcomes Les Arts Florissants' latest Monteverdi disc:

'One is torn between regret that there is to be only one further volume, and anticipation at what it might bring' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 70**



David Fanning listens to Paavo Järvi's Shostakovich cantatas:

'There are certainly no forces I would rather listen to in this repertoire than the ones assembled for this disc' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 72**

JS Bach

St Matthew Passion, BWV244 (arr Mendelssohn)

Jörg Dümmüller *ten* Evangelist **Marcos Fink** *bass*

Christus **Judith can Wanroij** *sop* **Helena Rasker**

contr **Maarten Koningsberger** *bass*

Consensus Vocalis; Netherlands Symphony

Orchestra / Jan Willem de Vriend

Challenge Classics ② CC72661 (112' • DDD)



The historical interest of Mendelssohn's text of the *St Matthew* perhaps lies less in

the details of the version than the pivotal importance of two performances (in 1829 and 1841) generally considered to have been the most important catalyst in Bach's reputational elevation after 75 years of little more than quiet connoisseurship. Even so, it's a riveting paradigm of the revisitation of this masterpiece, alighting as it does on the relative austerity of 19th-century Protestantism. It is the second score, from the performance in St Thomas's, Leipzig, that Jan Willem de Vriend employs for this recording, and there is good reason: the earlier Berlin version contained significant cuts which Mendelssohn judiciously reinstated in 1841, and he later felt – doubtless in the spirit of early antiquarianism – that a piano for the recitatives was far from ideal. Now we have a two-cello and double bass continuo and other pragmatic tweaks.

What we have learnt from previous recordings is Mendelssohn's greater respect for the rhetoric, moderate scale and direct urgency of the music than the subsequent generation of Victorian choral societies who embarked on Bach's 'Great Passion' with the manoeuvrability of a large battleship. Here we have a light-footed, modern-instrument account which gently projects the textural divergence and melodic simplification of 'awkward' Baroque contours, although 'Erbarne dich' for soprano rather reverses the trend with its extrovert reworking. Most striking are the deftly pointed recitatives, which reflect Mendelssohn's attention to narrative immediacy above all.

Despite Marcos Fink's tonally unsettled Christus and Jörg Dümmüller stretched a little too far as Evangelist and soloist, de Vriend certainly evokes the spirit of Mendelssohn's age. 'So ist mein Jesus nun gefangen' stands out, astonishing within a tableau of so few arias, and the chorales seem truly congregational, similar to what we experience in Mendelssohn's own *Paulus*. If a part of this aesthetic is clearly conveyed, there is a conundrum with the pacing; whether deliberately avoiding fashionable 'period' momentum or not, often we experience something studiously static.

Christoph Spering's more astringent 'period' instrument reading (Opus 111, 9/93 – nla) will satisfy those seeking studied objectivity with, for the most part, excellent singing. At the other extreme, Diego Fasolis (Assai, 4/03 – nla) offers a far more dramatically engaged and kaleidoscopic journey, despite an untidy production showing its hem at every corner with changing sound pictures and litany of clicks and clunks. This current recording lies, temperamentally, somewhere in the middle, though the singing is ultimately not good enough to compete with either, and it rarely imparts that intensity and 'robust genius' which so entranced Hegel and other luminaries in the audience.

Jonathan Freeman-Attwood

Brahms

Ein deutsches Requiem, Op 45

Christine Schäfer *sop* **Christian Gerhaher** *bar*

Bavarian Radio Chorus; Munich Philharmonic

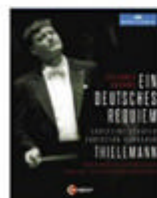
Orchestra / Christian Thielemann

Video director **Agnes Méth**

C Major Entertainment 719904

(83' • NTSC • 16:9 • 1080i • DTS-HD MA5.1, DTS5.1 & PCM stereo • 0 • s)

Recorded live at the Philharmonie im Gasteig, Munich, April 2007



This film dates from the middle of Thielemann's brief period in charge of the Munich Philharmonic. It

was first released on DVD in 2010 (C Major 703308); now reissued on Blu-ray, it competes with the conductor's performance of the *German Requiem* with the Berlin Philharmonic in January this year, available at the orchestra's Digital Concert Hall site.

A sober tread is common to both; in Munich, tempi are as expansive as you might expect, but Thielemann is too experienced a master of sustaining a line to let solemnity drag into torpor. He has at his disposal superbly drilled, well-modulated, semi-professional radio choirs in both Munich and Berlin. Back in 2007, the long march towards the Abiding City of the sixth movement was slower even than Karajan's performances (which are all swifter and more flexible than these), though the chorus puts a spring in its step with a little accent on each syllable; in Berlin Thielemann has slightly but significantly picked up the pace, without reaching the true, Baroque walking bass of Roger Norrington's recent Stuttgart recording (Hänssler, 6/15). The second movement's march builds steadily, with words phrased carefully, but the expressive result is disappointingly neutral. In writing the *Requiem*, Brahms's avowed intent was to comfort the living more than honour the dead, but I draw little comfort or warmth even from the sweetly blended centrepiece, 'How lovely are thy dwellings'. When the ghost of Schütz appears in the final movement, with the brass and choral homophony of 'Ja, der Geist spricht', he is lost amid the teak furniture, much more at home gliding through the worn stone of Norrington's halls.

In Berlin, Christian Gerhaher presents a more personally inflected, rounded and assertive portrayal of the baritone soloist as prophet than he had in Munich, where he seems muted. Most fascinating to me is Christine Schäfer, who in voice and even appearance becomes a Karajan soprano of the late '60s/early '70s, perhaps having keenly discerned where and when the performance feels most at home. Unlike Janowitz, she cannot take her opening phrase in a single breath, but at this tempo, no wonder. **Peter Quantrill**



Christian Thielemann conducting Brahms's German Requiem in Munich, in a performance made available once again on C Major DVD and Blu-ray

Caldara

Caldara *Morte e sepultura di Christo*, with instrumental pieces by **Caldara, Fux and Vivaldi**
Maria Grazia Schiavo, Silvia Frigato *sops*
Martina Belli *contr* **Anicio Zorzi Giustiniani** *ten*
Ugo Guagliardo *bass* **Stavanger Symphony Orchestra / Fabio Biondi** *vn*
 Glossa Ⓢ ② GCD923403 (125' • DDD • T/t)



Caldara had already written at least 19 oratorios for Mantua and Rome

before 1716, when he entered the service of Emperor Charles VI in Vienna. Over the next 20 years he wrote 23 oratorios for Lenten concert seasons. Along with works by colleagues Fux and Conti, this brought about a specifically Viennese tradition of the *Oratorio al Santissimo Sepolcro*, using librettos designed for Holy Week that were devoted to poetic reflections on the Crucifixion and burial of Christ. Caldara's third such 'sepulchral' oratorio was *Morte e sepoltura di Christo* (1724), first performed by a cast that included the young castrato Carestini (in the role of Maria di Giacobbe), almost a decade before Handel composed the title-role in *Ariodante* for him.

On this recording, key positions among the modern instruments of the Stavanger Symphony Orchestra are filled by director/violinist Fabio Biondi and a few hand-picked Italian colleagues from his period-instrument band Europa Galante. Mary Magdalene's first aria, 'Deh sciogliete', features a sombre *concertante* trio of two trombones and bassoon, and her plangent 'To t'offesi' features Lorenzo Coppola's intimate chalumeau obbligato playing (supported just by theorbist Giangiacomo Pinardi); with such fantastic music, the stylish Maria Grazia Schiavo can hardly go wrong. Joseph of Arimathea's 'Languire, morire' has a solo trombone part (Martina Belli sings emotively but a more relaxed approach to the vocal part is imaginable). Maria di Giacobbe's richly expressive sarabande 'È morto il mio Gesù' is sung passionately by Silvia Frigato, and Biondi joins Schiavo in the limelight in Mary Magdalene's 'Cari marmi'. Anicio Zorzi Giustiniani's ardent Nicodemus has a striking duet with Joseph of Arimathea in which the angular driving strings illustrate the nails being driven into Christ's hands and feet. Ugo Guagliardo's Roman Centurion booms resonantly.

The short madrigalian choruses that close each part are over-baked on account of the expert soloists smudging the contrapuntal

lines with operatic vibrato, and their strident ensemble singing also diminishes the effectiveness of the short two-minute motet *Laboravi in gemitu meo* (published Bologna, 1715), inserted here to function as a prologue. On a small number of occasions Biondi might be tinkering with orchestrations a little bit. He certainly inserts brief instrumental interludes: a sinfonia by Fux midway through Part 1, and Vivaldi's *Sonata al Santo Sepolcro* (RV130) at the start of Part 2 – appropriate for its sepulchral connotation, although it sticks out like a sore thumb. Even without all the extra trimmings, this is an essential addition to the Caldara discography. **David Vickers**

Gorczycki

Anonymous St Mary's bugle call **Gorczycki**
 In virtute tua Domine. O Rex gloriae, Domine.
 Illuxit sol. Missa Rorate. Conductus funebris.
 Sepulto Domino. Litania de Providentia Divina
The Sixteen / Eamonn Dougan
 Coro Ⓢ COR16130 (68' • DDD • T/t)



For over 700 years, every hour on the hour, a bugle call has sounded from the

tower of the Church of the Blessed Virgin Mary in Kraków. It's this fanfare, *Hejnał mariacki*, that forms the punchy opening to The Sixteen's third volume of Polish polyphony, setting the scene and segueing neatly into the muscular brass duels of Grzegorz Gerwazy Gorczycki's motet *In virtute tua Domine*. It's a lovely introduction to the music of a composer synonymous with Kraków, who spent almost his entire life in the city and was celebrated at his death in 1734 as 'the last great talent of the Polish Baroque era'.

This sense of location and Polishness is vital because, on a blind listen, you'd be more likely to place this music in Italy than in Poland – a musical legacy and influence already explored in the group's 'The Blossoming Vine'. On this latest disc, The Sixteen and their Associate Conductor Eamonn Dougan straddle eras, keeping one foot in the composer's unaccompanied *prima pratica* vocal works (strongly influenced by Palestrina) and one in his *seconda pratica* vocal-instrumental works with their Monteverdi-influenced sonic drama.

The juxtaposition is an effective one, not only giving a vivid sense of Gorczycki's scope and development but also keeping the ear guessing with its contrasting textures and moods. The centrepiece is the unaccompanied *Missa Rorate*. Scored for two sets of four voices, the work's Ordinary enjoys the brighter colours of SATB, while the Propers are scored for ATTB. It's an unusual approach but one that sustains the drama through this extended setting, and showcases The Sixteen's balance and blend.

The real excitement here, though, is in the Baroque repertoire: the urgent syncopations of *Illuxit sol*, passed like a hot potato between excellent soloists; the massive forces and sheer aural spectacle of the *Litania de Providentia Divina*. This is Italian music with just the faintest Polish accent – another significant find in this ambitious series. **Alexandra Coghlan**

Keiser/Bruhns

Bruhns (attrib Keiser) St Mark Passion

Jan Kobow *ten* Evangelist **Thomas E Bauer** *bass*

Jesus **Ensemble Jacques Moderne; Gli Incogniti /**

Joël Suhubiette

Mirare © MIR254 (76' • DDD • T/t)



It is often claimed that Bach performed Reinhard Keiser's *St Mark Passion* on Good Friday on at least three occasions between 1713 and the 1740s. There was a

patchy recording of this many moons ago (Christophorus, 3/95), but during the intervening decades scholarship has moved on. The rediscovered original printed libretto makes it very clear that it was composed for Holy Week 1707 by Hamburg Cathedral's director of music Friedrich Nicolaus Bruhns (1637–1718). This state of affairs is botched in Mirare's otherwise neatly organised documentation. Keiser deserves his gradual rehabilitation but his name shouldn't be on the cover. Bruhns's authorship need not diminish the usefulness of this reappraisal of a work that Bach knew and seems to have liked.

Joël Suhubiette conducts a fully rounded and sonorous performance. Jan Kobow is an ideally solemn Evangelist, and Christ's recitatives are sung compassionately by Thomas E Bauer (his questioning 'Eli, Eli, lama asabthani?' is movingly done). The instrumentalists of Gli Incogniti are renowned for their spiced interpretations, so it's no surprise they play without a whiff of formulaic safety, but nonetheless the bold colours remain firmly in the service of the mood of the text. Amandine Beyer's violin obbligato weeps softly in conversation with Stephan Van Dyck in the lament 'Wein, ach, wein jetzt um die Wette'; the partnership of Anne Magouët and oboist Antoine Torunczyk has compelling sincerity in 'O Golgatha! Platz herber Schmerzen'. The dozen singers of Ensemble Jacques Moderne produce a fulsomely textured choral sound, and perhaps the doleful suspense generated by the final chorus 'O Traurigkeit, o Herzeleid!' is the most revealing clue to what Bach gleaned from this score. **David Vickers**

MacMillan

St Luke Passion

National Youth Choir; Netherlands Radio Choir;

Netherlands Radio Philharmonic Orchestra /

Markus Stenz with **Peter Dicke** *org*

Challenge Classics © CC72671 (73' • DDD/DSD)



Words taken from the Magnificat make a somewhat surprising opening

to this second in the projected series of four Passion settings (the *St John* was completed in 2007) from James MacMillan. While the work's Prelude sets a text which is not part of the Passion narrative (the complete text, sadly, is not included with the disc), it marks the composer's intention to

frame the Passion story as related in chapters 22 and 23 of St Luke's Gospel with rather more optimistic texts.

Apart from some highly effective moments of controlled improvisation from the orchestra in both Prelude and Postlude, designed to convey an impression of the eternal mystery of the Kingdom of God, the musical language is direct and, typical of MacMillan, unashamed to show its influences (Stravinsky comes very much to mind with the rhythmically incisive male chorus opening of the setting of chapter 22, while Bach is invoked near the end of chapter 23). It is certainly a beautifully written work which focuses more on conveying the theology than the humanity of the Passion. For this reason the individuality of solo voices is avoided, with the adult chorus delivering the words of the Evangelist and the children's chorus the words of Christ (implying, as MacMillan suggests, the innocence of 'Christ as the sacrificial lamb').

Markus Stenz directed the world premiere of MacMillan's *St Luke Passion* in Amsterdam, and many of those original performers are involved on this disc. Stenz has got completely into the spirit of the music and creates a performance which is always compelling and occasionally electrifying (the devastating *crescendo* as the crowd cry 'Crucify Him' is truly awe-inspiring). The singers handle their heavy workload well, with no flagging of intensity or lack of precision, but it is the Netherlands Radio Philharmonic Orchestra, and especially organist Peter Dicke, who shine most in this recording. The virtuoso organ part, demanding much from the instrument itself (a huge sustained cluster in chapter 23 takes dangerous risks with wind supply), dovetails splendidly with an orchestra which, while described as 'modest' in size, nevertheless packs a powerful punch with some fabulously full-blooded and scintillating playing.

Marc Rochester

Monteverdi

'Madrigali, Vol 1 – Cremona'

Madrigals: Book 1 – Ch'ami la vita mia; Baci soavi, e cari; La vaga pastorella; Poi che del mio dolore; Questa ordi il laccio; Fumia la pastorella; Ardo sì ma non t'amo. Book 2 – Cantai un tempo; Non si levav'ancor l'alba novella; S'andasse Amor à caccia; Se tu mi lassi, perfida, tuo danno; Ecco mormorar l'onde. Book 3 – O primavera, gioventù de l'anno; Sovra tenere herbette, e bianchi fiori; Ch'io non t'ami, cor mio; Vattene pur, crudel

Les Arts Florissants / Paul Agnew

Les Arts Florissants Editions © AF005

(60' • DDD • T/t). Recorded live at the

Cité de la Musique, Paris, 2011-12



The second instalment of Les Arts Florissants's Monteverdi Madrigals series maintains the high standard set by the first



From the outset, the young Monteverdi knew how to clothe lovers' torment in music so beguiling as to induce the suspension of disbelief (in even most cynical listener) at the artificiality of his madrigal texts. With the opening phrase of 'Poi che del mio dolore', published when the composer was still in his teens, the protagonist's pain and Love's delight in causing it are evoked in the same moment. Whether or not it was planned that way, Paul Agnew and his singers impart to this passage a hesitancy, a poignant frailty that adds a further emotional layer to the construction. If a keen sense of the interpretative moment is the hallmark of ensemble performance at its best, then this new Monteverdi instalment from Les Arts Florissants deserves to be held up as such.

Chronologically, this second disc of a set of three is out of sequence: it offers a selection from Monteverdi's first three madrigal books, issued between 1587 and 1592 (subsequent books would be more spaced out). The madrigals from this Cremonese period are not as well known

as those of the subsequent Mantuan period in the previously issued Vol 2 – hence perhaps the label's decision to issue the latter first. I reviewed that volume very enthusiastically in January, praising its cohesion and spontaneity, the sense of risk-taking without a safety net. One might say the same of this one: in several places, particularly in Book 1, the music is taken by the scruff of the neck, the beat accelerating to the point where one anticipates things coming unstuck (try the 'thousand burning flames' of 'Questa ordi il laccio', or the lover's 'demented words' in 'Arsi e alsi à mia voglia', the *contrariposta* to 'Ardo sì ma non t'amo'). Agnew's selection from the next two books is as astute as before, and includes the 'mini-cycle' that concludes Book 3. I particularly enjoyed the breathless depiction of the hunt in 'S'andasse Amor à caccia' and the contrastingly leisurely progress of 'Ecco mormorar l'onde'.

Monteverdi completists will note the lack of competing accounts of Books 1 and 3 from Concerto Italiano, while Book 2 boasts comparably fine readings by both them and La Venexiana. Either way, this 'pocket cycle' from Les Arts Florissants deserves a space on the shelf next to them. That these are live performances, and in a

relatively dry though not unflattering acoustic, contributes to the sense of spontaneity. It also accounts for the odd stutter, which repeated listening, however, doesn't aggravate. As with the previous volume, packaging, presentation and accompanying essays are respectively handsome, clear and illuminating. One is torn between regret that there is to be only one further volume, and anticipation at what it might bring. **Fabrice Fitch**

Pärt

Te Deum. Wallfahrtslied.

Berliner Messe. Dopo la vittoria

Bavarian Radio Chorus;

Munich Radio Orchestra / Peter Dijkstra

BR-Klassik © 900511 (67' • DDD)



As 80th-birthday presents go, this handsomely produced tribute to Arvo Pärt

will take some surpassing. Recorded in 2012 and 2014, the programme's centrepiece is a spellbinding account of the half-hour-long *Te Deum*, first heard in Cologne in 1985. Scored for three choirs, strings, prepared piano and a recording of a

wind harp, this spacious music is full of alluring contrasts. The text is broken up by a series of short ritornellos and the use of a variety of choral textures. The clarity of Pärt's counterpoint is clothed in an especially fine raiment, including those characteristically wispy vibrato-free violins against the dark resonance of the superb bass voices. By way of contrast, *Wallfahrtslied* ('Pilgrims' Song'), a sublime *in memoriam* for the Estonian film and theatre director Grigori Kromanov, is a sort of vocal *Immovable Do* with the men floating on just one note as the strings shiver and yearn around them in a slow-motion chromatic haze.

The full, mixed choir returns for the *Berlin Mass*, in the 1992 version of five movements with string accompaniment. The *Kyrie*'s timeless quality sets the scene beautifully. Singers and players are perfectly balanced. Between the *Gloria* and *Credo* movements Peter Dijkstra interpolates the mini-cantata *Dopo la vittoria*, a commission by the City of Milan for the 1600th anniversary of St Ambrose's death. The opening bars of the cantata and the Mass's *Gloria* contain the only overtly fast and happy music on the disc. The final, soothing *Agnus Dei* ends with a calming vision of eternity. Simplicity is the keyword here.

Playing and singing are both beyond reproach, as is the glowing recorded sound in Munich's Prinzregententheater and Herkulesaal. **Malcolm Riley**

Penderecki

Magnificat³. Kaddisz²

^bOlga Pasichnyk *sop* ^bAlberto Mizrahi *ten* ^aWojtek Gierlach *bass* ^bDaniel Olbrychski *spkr* ^aMale vocal ensemble; ^aWarsaw Boys' Choir; ^aWarsaw Philharmonic Choir; ^aWarsaw Philharmonic Male Choir; Warsaw Philharmonic Orchestra / Antoni Wit

Naxos © 8 572697 (65' • DDD • T/t)



The Christian Magnificat and the Jewish Kaddish are, you might think,

completely different kinds of religious text. Yet judging by this pair of vocal works, completed 35 years apart (1974 and 2009), Penderecki approaches both in terms of a basic contrast between human frailty and divine power; it is this disparity that counts for more than the celebration of the miracle of Virgin Birth in the former or the solemn commemoration of human mortality in the latter. When the *Magnificat* finally explodes into celebration, it does so in spectacularly emphatic fashion, and the

ever-imperturbable Antoni Wit is in his element throughout, sustaining the tension in the quieter early stages and delivering maximum impact later on.

Lasting 45 minutes and scored for substantial vocal and instrumental forces, this is unambiguously a concert work – a kind of choral symphony in five movements. Its emphasis on male voices seems at odds with the character of the text and this, coupled with the weighty, lament-like demeanour of much of the score, set against moments of well-nigh brutal turbulence, might even suggest that the composer cannot suppress some scepticism about the Magnificat's spiritual ethos.

But there is no question of scepticism when it comes to *Kaddisz*. This four-movement cantata is haunted by the Holocaust, beginning as it does with settings of anguished lines by a young Polish writer who died at Auschwitz in 1944. The short second movement is even more aggressive, as verses from the Lamentations of Jeremiah are fiercely declaimed in Polish. The second half – verses from the Book of Daniel for a *cappella* choir, and Kaddish prayers featuring a cantor-style tenor – is more consolatory; and the relatively short time-span of the whole contributes to a sense of concentration and clarity missing from the much earlier *Magnificat*. **Arnold Whittall**

Rihm

Et lux

Huelgas Ensemble; Minguet Quartet /

Paul Van Nevel

ECM New Series © 481 1585 (62' • DDD)



Wolfgang Rihm originally conceived *Et lux* for the four voices of the all-male

Hilliard Ensemble and the Arditti String Quartet, who gave the first performance in 2009. This recording, which has Rihm's approval, doubles the vocal forces, with sopranos instead of countertenors, a move that underlines the work's essential duality – voices and instruments, the old and the new. The voices articulate fragments of the Latin Requiem texts while the instruments sometimes support, sometimes prompt, often challenge the expressive character of the vocal music. The result is a bifurcated musical fabric which constantly approaches – but looks askance at – traditional harmonic structures, with their tidy distinctions between consonance and dissonance.

The most pervasive challenge of *Et lux* involves ECM's decision to offer a single

track of 61'32", to exclude the sung texts from the booklet, and not to ask the German- and English-language annotators to key their narratives to timed references. The justification for the single track lies in the music's sustained continuity, its governing constraints of register and texture. Yet this is not seamless classical continuity. Contrasts do not simply diversify and decorate the principal material but disrupt it, rendering its stability and orderly progress uneasy and fraught. Rihm's musical thinking lies at the heart of present-day modernism's commitment to what Pierre Boulez (with reference to Berg) once termed 'radical renewal'. Discarding the avant-garde ideal of seeking to ignore the past, Rihm aims to construct something positive and memorable out of textual and musical elements that acknowledge their distance from earlier – especially Renaissance and Baroque – Requiem settings, yet which still aspire to the kind of clarity that resolutely refuses to fall back on neo-romantic pathos.

This extremely well-recorded performance finely conveys the music's searing struggle to cohere; and while some of the more austere episodes might strain the listener's concentration, they are set against eruptive, even melodramatic passages that demonstrate Rihm's special ability to make something distinctively edgy out of meditation and reflection. This music's contemporaneity is all the more potent for its questioning attitude to religious beliefs, as well as to the musical methods of past times. **Arnold Whittall**

Shostakovich

'Cantatas'

The Execution of Stepan Razin, Op 119. The Sun Shines Over Our Motherland, Op 90. The Song of the Forests, Op 81

Kostiantin Andrejev *ten* Aleksei Tanovitski *bass* Narva Boys' Choir; Estonian Concert Choir; Estonian National Symphony Orchestra / Paavo Järvi

Erato © 2564 61666-6 (80' • DDD)



Divining the intention behind Shostakovich's cantatas is a favourite

game for commentators. Hackwork carried out with a minimum of commitment? Unsullied Socialist Realist acclamation? Secret subversion? Affirmation of what Socialist Realism might have been had it not been debauched by talentless time-servers? All those readings are potentially supported by the music, albeit to varying



The Estonian Philharmonic Chamber Choir and condutor Heikki Seppänen, who present all of Sibelius's works for mixed choir on their new Ondine release

degrees according to the work in question, because there is no getting away from the caustic aggression of *The Execution of Stepan Razin*, the triumphalism of *The Song of the Forests* or the blandness of *The Sun Shines Over Our Motherland*, whatever spirit those qualities may have been intended in. Nor is there much that performers can do, beyond giving them a maximum of welly.

Which is precisely what Paavo Järvi and his Estonian forces do. Indeed, so rich is the tone of the Estonian Concert Choir that they eclipse even Ashkenazy's lusty Latvians in *The Song of the Forests*, while bass Aleksei Tanovitski certainly outshines his rival (tenor Kostiantin Andrejev is admittedly rather less outstanding). Nor is the orchestra anything less than mightily impressive; not even in the hands of Kondrashin in 1965 (*Melodiya*, 1/69, 4/07) has *Razin* sounded more excoriating.

Each of those longer works has been reasonably well served by recordings. A rarer bird, however, is *The Sun Shines Over Our Motherland*, composed in 1952 for the 19th Congress of the Communist Party. Indefensible in almost any aesthetic terms you care to mention, this is performed here with such gusto that the assumption Shostakovich was composing with his fingers crossed seems not entirely safe.

Is it too much to hope for a follow-up, containing the remaining cantatas and the unaccompanied choruses *Loyalty*, composed for Lenin's centenary and long since unobtainable on CD? There are certainly no forces I would rather listen to in this repertoire than the ones assembled for this acoustically resplendent disc. **David Fanning**

Stepan Razin – selected comparison:

Shenyang, Latvian Chor, Ashkenazy

(12/13) (ONDI) ODE1225-2

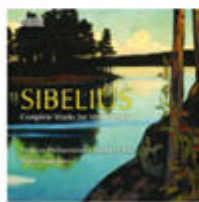
Sibelius

Complete Works for Mixed Choir

Estonian Philharmonic Chamber Choir /

Heikki Seppänen

Ondine ® ② ODE1260-2D (104' • DDD)



The Estonian Philharmonic Chamber Choir and their Finnish conductor, Heikki Seppänen, have left no musical stone unturned in their quest to find and record every piece that Sibelius composed for mixed choir. Here we have 58 tracks (the shortest just 27 seconds in duration) on two discs, making a total of just over 100 minutes' worth of music.

Sibelius composed his first choral songs in the late 1880s. He was then kept busy throughout his career with both male-voice and mixed-choir festival commissions. Some are gems, others less memorable. However, the majority rise above the merely average and are invariably imbued with a fine sense of word-setting. This release includes everything up to Sibelius's arrangement of a favourite children's Christmas song, penned in 1954, when he was 89.

Disc 1 gets off to a fine start with the warm glow of *Rakastava* ('The Lover'), Sibelius's pioneering and longest a *cappella* work. Arttu Kataja's baritone solo is especially impressive here. The Op 18 Songs are equally effective and memorable, notably the extended 'Glade of Tuoni'. Much of his choral writing consists of melody-dominated homophony, with clear-cut, regular phrasing (naturally suggested by the strophic nature of his texts) and soaring, memorable melodic lines, clothed with wholesome diatonic harmonies – it sounds as though it is deeply rewarding to sing. Occasionally there are unexpected (and welcome) modulations, for example in the exceptionally beautiful 'Dreams' of 1917.

None of the three tiny *Carminalia* of 1898 is a gem by any means. Alas, for the sake of completeness, they are heard in three guises:

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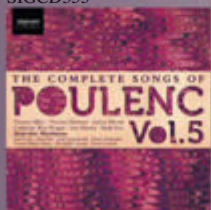
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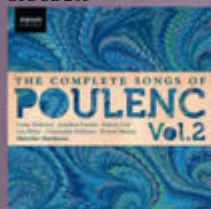


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a cappella, with harmonium and then with piano. The *Three Songs for American Schools* of 1913 also have an inconsequential charm. From the Op 23 collection (salvaged from an incomplete academic degree cantata for the University of Helsinki), the most attractive numbers include 'Like a Surging Stream', which is enhanced by the addition of obbligato bass drum, cymbals and triangle. Finally, there are two versions of the *Finlandia* hymn. Given that this tune, above all others, embodies the patriotic musical sentiment of Finland, I found these performances somewhat lacking in fervour. Occasionally some of the sopranos' harder tone becomes a little wearying. Although the recorded sound is quite neutral it captures well the robust, outdoor nature of this repertoire. **Malcolm Riley**

Talbot

Path of Miracles

Conspirare / Craig Hella Johnson

Harmonia Mundi (E) HMU80 7603

(65' • DDD/DSD • T/t)



This isn't the first time that American choir Conspirare has gone head-to-head with

Britain's own Tenebrae. Last year the former's 'The Sacred Spirit of Russia' (3/14) was released within weeks of the latter's 'Russian Treasures' (4/14) – a battle that saw Conspirare take the laurels. This time, however, Tenebrae have a clear edge in Joby Talbot's *Path of Miracles* – a work they originally commissioned in 2005, recorded in 2006, and which here receives its second recording. That the piece already has two such high-profile recordings is unusual, testimony, perhaps, not only to Talbot's rapidly rising star but also to this choral cantata's epic, mystical quality – charged with the same sacred energy that draws listeners to the music of John Tavener and Arvo Pärt.

Inspired by the Camino de Santiago – the ancient pilgrim route – the work's four movements offer their own musical pilgrimage, starting as 'Roncesvalles', moving through 'Burgos' and 'León' to finish at 'Santiago' itself. Each city is characterised in vivid musical brushstrokes, drawing on plainchant, Taiwanese Pasiputput (whose unearthly vocalisations are used to startling effect in the opening) and minimalism's obsessive repetitions and slow-phase shifts. This is musical mysticism at its richest and most greedy – grasping from all traditions and sources, and treasuring each element in this musical

collage. But it's a work whose patchwork fragments need the energy of live performance to really knit, relying on the charge of emotion, of ritual, to integrate them into a larger artistic gesture. If you do want a recording, then Tenebrae's offers the thicker, more resonant approach – a generosity of sound that matches its material, amplifying as well as reflecting it. There's no faulting the leaner Conspirare for accuracy or musicality, it's just that Tenebrae do it better. One-all; bring on the next round. **Alexandra Coghlan**

Comparative version:

Tenebrae, *Short* (8/06) (SIGN) SIGCD078

Verdi

Messa da Requiem

Anja Harteros *sop* Daniela Barcellona *mez*

Wooyoung Kim *ten* Georg Zeppenfeld *bass*

Munich Philharmonic Choir and Orchestra /

Lorin Maazel

Sony Classical (E) 2 88875 08330-2 (92' • DDD)

Recorded live at the Philharmonie im Gasteig,

Munich, February 2014



Lorin Maazel made his Proms debut with this work back in

1969, the first live performance of the score that I heard. One of the conductor's two previous recordings of the score, both DVDs, was given with his own Symphonica Toscanini in Venice in 2007 to mark the 50th anniversary of the maestro's death. Richard Osborne (A/09) called it 'measured, occasionally brilliant, sometimes moving', a result we might expect from this well-organised musician, more German- than Italian-trained.

Recorded at Munich concerts in 2014 a few months before the conductor's death, Maazel's reading now sounds more of a piece than in 2007. As a general indication of intent, the stopwatch shows that he was getting slower, his 'Requiem and Kyrie' and the 'Libera me' now outlasting de Sabata's (the former section now takes three minutes more than Toscanini in 1940) and even rivalling the transcendental non-impetus of Celibidache's performance with these same forces. Yet overall this does not herald an unidiomatic north-of-the-Alps attempt to make sacred drama more oratorio-like; rather it presages a degree of commitment from the performers which is actually quite nakedly emotional.

That's maybe a rare phenomenon from the sometime Maazel of old, but not here where – in, for example, the (tricky) Sequence through 'Dies irae' to 'Lacrymosa' – he has found a happy

golden mean of pace and colour. The interest in ferreting out (and getting right) little details which always marked his readings of early-20th-century music – and perhaps encouraged the composing ventures of his later years – is put to good use here in his evident enjoyment of the soprano's long-held 'Sed' ('but') calling for Michael to show the holy light in the quartet of the 'Offertorio', and the inventively varied string patterns with which Verdi punctuated section ends.

The solo quartet settle down into a solid, fluent team. Harteros and Barcellona are almost old hands at recording this work now; at first the mezzo's words are not ideally clear nor the soprano's soft *pianissimos* ideally centred, but they bring off the 'Agnus Dei' with some passion (and Harteros the 'Libera me'). Tenor Wooyoung Kim relaxes too into more cooperative dynamics; bass Georg Zeppenfeld is assured throughout. Andreas Herrmann's chorus, especially the basses, demonstrate ideal consistency and strength. This new interpretation is not going to annihilate competition of the order of Toscanini, Muti, Bernstein and Gardiner – or the recent rivals from down the road under Jansons (BR-Klassik, ArtHaus, 1/15) – but it's a finely worked *ave atque vale* from its chief. **Mike Ashman**

'Coronation Music for Charles II'

Adson Courtley Masquing Ayres a 5 – No 19-21

Anonymous Almand à 6 Bassano Pavana and

Galliarda a 5. Galliarda and Coranto a 5. Pavana

a 6 Byrd In nomine a 5. Miserere a 4. Browning

a 5, 'The leaves be green' Child O Lord, grant

the King a long life Fantini Entrata imperiale

Humfrey The King shall rejoice. Te Deum

Lawes Fantazia II a 6 Locke Five-Part Things

for the Cornetts Mersenne L'entrée...A cheval...

Cavalcade & Double Cavalcade...Le retraite

Parsons The Song Called Trumpets

Psallentes; Oltremontano / Wim Becu

Accent (E) ACC24300 (67' • DDD • T/t)



It is tempting to speculate about what kind of music Charles II heard at

his coronation at Westminster Abbey on St George's Day 1661. This programme is a conjectural fantasy that sometimes contradicts the known facts (which is acknowledged in Greta Haenen's booklet-note). Trumpet fanfares by Marin Mersenne and Girolamo Fantini herald the king's entry to London; austerity doesn't permit Wim Becu to field the 17 trumpeters

Charles II had at his disposal but Oltremontano's four players make a fine noise. Matthew Locke's five-part suite for the reconstituted royal wind band, described by the composer as 'For His Majesty's Sackbuts and Cornetts', were played during a triumph procession on the day before the coronation; it is performed here with nuanced shading and flawless technique.

The coronation service featured William Child's anthem *O Lord, grant the King a long life*, sung here with bold authority by the 10 singers of Psallentes and doubled vividly by cornetts and sackbuts – but in 1661 it was sung by the combined choirs of the Chapel Royal and Westminster Abbey. Henry Lawes's *Zadok the Priest* was definitely performed in 1661 but is not included here (there is a recording by Simon Preston). Some artistic licence stretches credibility too far. Pelham Humfrey was only 14 years old in 1661 and his setting of *The King shall rejoice* was actually written for Charles II's birthday some years later; moreover, the instrumental parts are for strings rather than the cornetts and sackbuts on offer here, although its grand conclusion, featuring Bart Rodyn's gutsy organ-playing, sets the seal on some splendid music-making. Pepys wrote that the musical entertainment at the post-coronation banquet in Westminster Hall was played by the court string band (the '24 Violins') but instead Oltremontano's brass players provide a selection of pavans, galliards and fantazias. The aromatic tint of Westminster Abbey's bells and library soundscapes (horses, crowds of people, and someone sounding like Brian Blessed shouting 'The King!') all seem a bit pointless when this album clearly isn't a credible reconstruction of events – but on their own terms these excellent performances are highly enjoyable.

David Vickers

'François I'

'Music of a Reign'

Part 1 – Mass for the Field of the Cloth of Gold: sacred works by **Anonymous**, **Divitis**, **Ludford**, **Mouton**, **Sermilä** and **Sermisy**; Part 2 – La chambre du roi: secular works by **Anonymous**, **Attaignant**, **Certon**, **Févin**, **Gervaise**, **Lupi**, **Penet**, **Phalèse**, **Rippe**, **Sandrin** and **Sermisy**
Doulce Mémoire / **Denis Raisin Dadre**
Zig-Zag Territoires © 2 ZTZ357 (143) • DDD



This year's quincentenary of the accession of King Francis I is being commemorated by a number of ensembles. This impressive offering from Doulce Mémoire, which is unlikely to be

surpassed for scale or splendour, recalls Alia Vox's lavishly illustrated and documented productions. Its two CDs are devoted to sacred and secular repertories respectively. The first reimagines the music for the High Mass that concluded the historic 'Field of the Cloth of Gold' summit of 1520 between Francis and Henry VIII, in which both chapels royal participated. Which works they sang is not known but Denis Raisin Dadre's selection draws plausibly on the principal composers active within each group. The choice of Sermisy, Mouton and Divitis to represent the French is logical; that of Ludford on the English side is more surprising but very welcome. If the resulting confrontation of styles is one of the project's most stimulating and unusual elements, the performances themselves are more variable: unsurprisingly given their discography, Doulce Mémoire are most at home with Sermisy but the selections from Ludford's *Missa Benedicta et venerabilis* are less assured. The vocal ensemble lacks body and is oddly mismatched (Véronique Bourin seems to me miscast as a high treble) and struggles to shape convincingly the longer, more polyphonically intricate pieces generally.

Doulce Mémoire are far more secure in the secular disc, which presents some of the most famous polyphonic songs of the day in rarely heard, rewardingly inventive reworkings. Among the finest of these are from a publication by Pierre Certon, the now missing voice parts of which have been reconstructed for this recording. The instrumental consorts are especially fine, a technical and artistic match for the inventiveness of the programming. They more than make up for my reservations concerning the sacred disc.

Fabrice Fitch

'If the Owl Calls Again'

Bridge Three Songs **Caplet** Ecoute mon coeur
Delage Quatre Poèmes hindous **Kanter**
Abboen. Onbot. Arapka **Martin** Trois Chants
de Noël **Marx** Durch einsamkeiten. Adagio
Mussorgsky Prayer. Evening Prayer.
The soul flew quietly through the celestial
skies **Ravel** Deux Mélodies hébraïques
Christianne Stotijn *mez* **Antoine Tamestit** *va*
Rick Stotijn *db* **Joseph Breinl** *pf* **Oxalys**
Warner Classics © 5419 63937-5 (62) • DDD



Christianne Stotijn reveals her fascination with the owl both as a source of wisdom and as a 'philosophical recognition of

Song recitals don't come much more eclectic than this. In the booklet interview

nature, of where we come from'. With Alaskan poet John Haines's 'If the owl calls again' as epigraph, the owl becomes the inspiration for a programme of religious and contemplative songs that, in Stotijn's words, express 'both the deepest resonance of the primal force and the voice of uncertainty and doubt'.

You'll look in vain, though, for the nocturnal bird of prey in the songs themselves, which range from the limpid innocence of Frank Martin's *Chants de Noël* via the sultry orientalisms of Ravel and Delage to the Romantic passion and melancholy of Bridge's early songs with viola. As you might suspect, soulful slowness prevails. Yet the varied sonorities and idioms, and Stotijn's range of colour and emotional intensity, preclude any whiff of monotony.

Stotijn also proves herself something of a linguistic virtuoso, whether singing in idiomatic French, English or (in two neo-Straussian songs by Joseph Marx) German, or intoning the contemporary Dutch composer Fant de Kanter's Aramaic and Yiddish prayers with keening urgency. In her own language, she relishes the fun of Kanter's song about a little boy teaching a dog to pray, abetted by canine woofs and growls from the double bass. Accompanied by the raw, primitive sounds of the duduk, she declaims Ravel's quasi-improvised lament 'Kaddish' with the freedom and fervour of a Jewish cantor. And with the evocative sonorities of the Oxalys ensemble, she vividly catches the mystery, sensuousness and (in the song about the birth of Buddha) pulsing excitement in Delage's Ravel-influenced *Quatre Poèmes hindous*.

In the Mussorgsky Stotijn finds a child-like purity of tone, without affectation – a nicely judged touch of breathiness, too, for the flustered boy's 'Evening Prayer'. She is simple and sincere in Martin's 'Christmas Song', adorned by chaste flute melismas, and by turns ardent and movingly intimate in the three Bridge songs, where the copper glow of her mezzo is complemented by the dusky-toned viola. Stotijn's regular pianist Joseph Breinl impresses with the variety and delicacy of his touch. If owl lovers may feel short-changed, Stotijn fans and adventurous song aficionados should need no encouragement to investigate a thoroughly memorable recital. **Richard Wigmore**

'Love I Obey'

Anonymous Bruton Town. Geordie. Hush you bye. A Hymn to the Evening. I once loved a lass. Jack Hall. O Death. Poor wayfaring stranger. Wagoner's Lad. What if a day **Helstroffer** Echoes **Henry VIII** Pastime with good company **Lawes** Love I obey **Purcell** An Evening Hymn **J Wilson** I love a lassie

Rosemary Standley *voc* **Michel Godard** *serpent/bugle* **Martin Bauer** *va da gamba* **Bruno Helstroffer** *theo/gtr* **Elisabeth Geiger** *org/muselaar/hpnd*
Alpha Ⓢ ALPHA538 (58' • DDD)



Look back over the classical releases of the past few years and you'll see a

trend emerging. Sitting somewhere at the junction of folk music, early music, bluegrass, jazz and even pop, it includes albums like Andreas Scholl's 'Wayfaring Stranger' (Decca, 1/02), Apollo's Fire's 'Come to the River' (Avie), Anonymous 4's wonderful '1865' (Harmonia Mundi, 2/15), most of L'Arpeggiata and even Concerto Caledonia's 'Purcell's Revenge' (Delphian – see below). 'Love I Obey' is a new addition to the genre, a disc steeped in whiskey and woodsmoke, tragic deaths and even more tragic loves.

If you're not into indie French-American bands then you might not have come across Rosemary Standley, lead vocalist of Moriarty, a country-blues-rock collective whose music recently took an acoustic turn. Her voice is the guiding thread through an album that sets 17th-century English ballads (Purcell, Lawes) alongside traditional American folksongs, and pairs a theorbo, viola da gamba and serpent with guitar and bugle. The results are bewitchingly lovely, and more organic than many similar genre-crossing experiments. That's mostly down to Standley, whose delivery is disarmingly direct, cultivated naivety. There's an innocence at the top of this American-accented voice that blends down to a startling guttural depth at the bottom. She's supported by the crack team of Bruno Helstroffer on theorbo and guitar (by turns elegant and folk-percussive), and keyboardist Elisabeth Geiger, with occasionally jazz-style breaks from Michel Godard on serpent and bugle.

Inevitably, not all tracks are created equal. The traditional American repertoire is the most natural fit, but the title-song by William Lawes and Henry VIII's 'Pastime with good company' also come off well. Purcell's *Evening Hymn* is unexpectedly frenetic but none the worse for that.

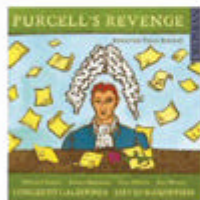
Alexandra Coghlan

'Purcell's Revenge'

'Sweeter than Roses?'

Chaney Cassiopeia **Oswald** Moonlight on the Green **Purcell** Abdelazer – Jigg; Rondeau. Aminta one night had occasion to piss. Amphitryon – Scotch Tune. Close thine eyes. An Evening Hymn. Fairest isle. The Fairy Queen

– First Music: Hornpipe. Fantazia in Four Parts No 11. The Married Beau – Hornpipe on a Ground. Music for a while. A New Scotch Tune. Old Sir Simon the king. One charming night. Peggie I must love thee. The Plaint. Second Part of Musick's Hand-maid – Jigg. Sweeter than roses. There's not a swain on the plain. What shall I do to show how much I love her (with variations by Oswald) **Silvera** Halos **Olivia Chaney, Ana Silvera, Jim Moray** *sgrs* **James Bowman** *countertenor*
Concerto Caledonia / David McGuinness
Delphian Ⓢ DCD34161 (66' • DDD)



Folk-minded early music ensemble Concerto Caledonia have titled their latest

disc 'Purcell's Revenge' but to many listeners its irreverent reworkings and indie-pop aesthetic will sound more like *Revenge on Purcell*. The composer's crime? Writing bass-lines that are just too damn catchy for contemporary musicians to leave alone.

Yet for all the riff-like charms of their ground basses, Purcell's songs have proved surprisingly resistant to reinvention. Even the reliably brilliant L'Arpeggiata struggled to say anything in their recent jazz-infused 'Music for a While: Improvisations on Purcell' (Erato, 5/14) that wouldn't have been better articulated by Purcell himself. So to say that Concerto Caledonia's album veers between maddening and utterly joyous is to put them well ahead of the curve.

The group have invited a starry selection of singers (most from outside the classical world, though James Bowman also sneaks on to the roster) to join them as guest artists in an album designed to feel like a live set. Some fare better than others. Contributions from Ana Silvera and Olivia Chaney take this familiar music and make it absolutely their own (when not using their own original songs to pay homage to Purcell), and instrumental numbers are full of wit and energy. Jim Moray, however, brings little to 'Music for a while' or 'Fairest isle' beyond an unattractive truculence of delivery and a lack of closing consonants, and Bowman's numbers have been better recorded by the singer elsewhere.

David McGuinness makes a passionate case against the 'homogenisation' of early music performance in the booklet but the album itself is more equivocal. If you're certain you can improve on Purcell, then go right ahead. If not, you're better to leave well alone.

Alexandra Coghlan

'Romaria'

'Choral Music from Brazil'

Aguilar *Antiquae preces christianae*
Almeida Prado *Oráculo* **Araneda** *Ismália*
Escobar *Missa breve sobre ritmos populares brasileiros* **Curitiba** *Metaphors* **Lacerda** *Romaria*
Pinto Fonseca *Jubiabá* **Santoro** *Ave-Maria*
Traditional *Carimbó* (arr Mahle). *Moreninha se eu te pedisse* (arr da Silva Ramos) **Villa-Lobos** *Cor dulce, cor amabile. Magnificat-Alleluia*
Choir of Gonville & Caius College, Cambridge / Geoffrey Webber with **Kate Symonds-Joy** *mez*
Liam Crangle *org*
Delphian Ⓢ DCD34147 (71' • DDD • T/I)



The rainforest tape that opens this remarkable disc might seem a Brazilian cliché – and

in a sense it is. But it is a significant one, forming part of Henrique de Curitiba's *Metaphors* (1973), a work whose choral component (and thematic material) is the 'Et incarnatus est' from the *Credo* of Victoria's *Missa Quarti toni*, exploiting astoundingly high soprano-writing, sung with bell-like clarity here by Billie Robinson and Emily Kay. The ear-catching tape is in fact a reconstruction (the original is lost), part of an adventurous collaboration between the Choir of Gonville & Caius and the choral department of the University of São Paulo.

Brazilian choral music, even that by Villa-Lobos, is hardly well known outside its native country, so this is an important and revelatory disc. Curitiba's arresting work is followed by a much more conventional set of folksong arrangements by Ernst Mahle, and Osvaldo Lacerda's setting of Carlos Drummond de Andrade's poem 'Romaria', which includes recitation of sections of the text. Pinto Fonseca's *Jubiabá* is an evocation of a *candomblé* ceremony, forming a Brazilian contrast with the Latin Christian texts of both Ernani Aguilar's *Antiquae preces christianae* and Villa-Lobos's *Cor dulce, cor amabile* and *Magnificat-Alleluia* (majestically performed here in the composer's own arrangement with organ), while Aylton Escobar brings folk and church culture together in his striking *Missa breve* on Brazilian folk rhythms.

The most remarkable pieces here are Curitiba's *Metaphors* and the stunning Portuguese-texted *Ave-Maria* by Cláudio Santoro, but all of the music is worth hearing. Much of it is technically demanding but, under Geoffrey Webber's clearly inspired direction, the Caius Choir sound as though they have known this music intimately for years.

Ivan Moody

REISSUES

James Jolly on a batch of Warner Classics reissues and a fine memento of Sir Charles Groves in his centenary year

Some Warner classics

Recordings from the EMI catalogue repackaged with their original artwork

The acquisition by Warner of EMI has necessitated a re-brand – blue replacing red and a batch of EMI's best-selling (I assume) recordings now emerging under the Warner Classics logo. The recordings have all been entrusted to remastering gurus Andrew Walter, Simon Gibson and the team at Abbey Road, and they've been subjected to the same love and care as was directed at the magnificent Maria Callas set that Richard Osborne welcomed last year (A/14). In every case, the sound has been improved – colours seem more vibrant, front-to-back perspective appears stronger and it all sounds fresh and immediate.

Some of the recordings are classics and need no more than 'It's back and if you don't have it, buy it!' from me.

'This is music-making to put a smile on even the grumpiest of faces'

Four stand head and shoulders above the others in their near-ideal balance of artist and repertoire. Arturo Benedetti Michelangeli's 1957 coupling of **Ravel's** G major and **Rachmaninov's** Fourth piano concertos is a true classic. As if cut from a single diamond, these performances sparkle and glint with an extraordinary translucence, and the Philharmonia (under Ettore Gracis) are superbly responsive and imaginative partners. If you don't know this recording, now's your chance: it's never sounded so good. Adorned in its original sleeve, it retails for £7 but can be found via mail order for a lot less.

David Oistrakh in **Prokofiev** (the two violin concertos and the Second Sonata) has a unique authority. While none of the works was actually written for him (though he did bring about the transcription for violin and piano of the Flute Sonata to create the Second Sonata), he became a

loyal and imaginative Prokofiev interpreter. Oistrakh's burnished, lyrical line is a constant wonder, and the remastering has wrought miracles and demands a hearing. (Alceo Galliera and Lovro von Matačić are fine conducting partners, and Vladimir Yampolsky, a regular Oistrakh pianist-partner, is also superb.)

The third classic is a recital by the short-lived (he died at 33) Romanian pianist Dinu Lipatti. Music by **Bach**, **Scarlatti**, **Mozart** (the A minor Sonata, K310) and **Schubert** (two Impromptus) receives playing of breathtaking genius – extraordinary insights worn so lightly that Lipatti appears merely as a conduit. The sound here does betray its years but with playing like this a few concessions are required – the rewards are immense.

Sir Thomas Beecham's **Bizet** Symphony in C and music from *L'Arlésienne* could easily stand as an exemplar of what this conductor is all about: elegance, style, charm, wit and an incomparable lightness of touch leap from these 1957 and '61 recordings. Only Charles Munch, with a lithic orchestral sound, delivered the Symphony with more style – but that's setting the bar very high. Beecham with the Orchestre National de la Radiodiffusion Française (Symphony) and the RPO, with its stellar wind section (*L'Arlésienne*), is magnificent – this is music-making to put a smile on even the grumpiest of faces.

Heitor Villa-Lobos conducting his own music also has a unique status and his *Bachianas Brasileiras* Nos 1, 2, 5 and 9 receive performances of great spirit from the Orchestre National de la Radiodiffusion Française. The 'pop' here is the Aria from *BB* No 5, sung with gorgeous tone and spectacular control by Victoria de los Angeles; but there's so much more on offer in these four pieces and, under the composer's baton, their spirit and humour emerge with winning



Sir Thomas Beecham's sparkling Bizet returns

directness. The closing section of *BB* No 2, 'The Little Train of the Caipira', is a total charmer. Again, a nice job has been done on the sound.

More modern recordings also feature and André Previn's LSO **Gershwin** collection (*Rhapsody in Blue*, Piano Concerto and *An American in Paris*) has scrubbed up nicely, with some very deft and stylish piano-playing from Previn in the dual role of soloist and conductor. The LSO once again prove themselves the UK's finest 'American' orchestra, with superb solo work from clarinetist Jack Brymer and trumpeter Howard Snell. I should point out that Jeremy Nicholas had reservations about Previn's *Gershwin* Concerto when he contributed a *Gramophone* Collection on the work in June 2007, finding it 'almost glib' and 'facile', so try and hear it first.

The late Aldo Ciccolini's **Satie** recording is certainly not the last word in Satie-playing but it did play an important role in re-evaluating this enigmatic composer's music. It's done very straight – as it should be – and its dry wit is surprisingly effective under this great pianist's fingers. The programme, too, contains pretty well all the Satie plums.

The recording by Sviatoslav Richter and Carlos Kleiber of the **Dvořák** Piano Concerto (in the composer's original version) has an almost cult status – due, no doubt, to the two musicians' combination but also to the fact that Kleiber rarely made records. They apparently didn't get along very well at all and the recording was not a particularly happy experience. Richter was no stranger to the concerto, Kleiber



probably hadn't enjoyed such a long acquaintance with the work, but I must say the performance comes across with terrific flair, with some gorgeous orchestral playing (Bavarian State Orchestra) and magnificent piano-playing. The coupled **Schubert Wanderer** Fantasy is quite simply shattering and just demands to be heard.

A clutch of recordings by the Alban Berg Quartet return in this series. Their **Schubert** (*Rosamunde*, *Death and the Maiden* and final quartets coupled with D87) is played with a winning and very Viennese spirit. I've always enjoyed these recordings and they sound ideally fresh here. Their **Haydn** (Opp 33, 76 and 77 Nos 1 and 2) is beautifully characterised and played with absolute authority – and with considerable power. The ABQ recorded the **Beethoven** quartet cycle twice and their second (live) set of the late quartets reappears on a three-CD set. The 'liveness' certainly paid huge



Magnificent pianism from Dinu Lipatti

dividends and these performance have a real sense of music made on the wing, a genuine spontaneity of gesture coupled with playing of amazing security.

Paul Tortelier's **Bach** Cello Suites were recorded in London's Temple Church in 1982 and have been remastered well – the slight dryness that characterised earlier incarnations is not so noticeable or distracting, but the directness of Tortelier's playing and his palpable humanity shine through every bar. The period movement may have realigned our response to this music but Tortelier's Bach (like Milstein's) has an honesty that's very hard to resist. These may not be a natural first choice but they will bring enormous rewards to anyone prepared to spend time with Bach and Tortelier.

Leonard Bernstein conducting the Orchestre National de France in music by **Darius Milhaud** is great fun, *Le boeuf sur le toit* not surprisingly a feat of rhythmic control; and to make the CD a decent length, we're given the composer's own recording of his complete *Saudades do Brasil* alongside Bernstein's excerpts. I can totally understand what attracted Bernstein to this music and he pays touching tribute to a fellow composer by giving performances of utmost fidelity and passion.

Riccardo Muti's coupling of **Vivaldi's** *Gloria* and *Magnificat* (recorded with the Philharmonia and Chorus in 1976 and '77) does sound very strange to 2015 ears. This is undeniably Big Band Baroque and the soloists, Teresa Berganza and Lucia Valentini Terrani, don't really sound very comfortable. There's plenty of rhythmic vitality here but the overall weight of sound just seems so inappropriate. It's really a case of 'you'll like this if this is the sort of thing you like'.

You'd think the same might be said for Otto Klemperer's **Bach St Matthew Passion**, except the utter commitment to this music is truly convincing. Incandescent playing by the Philharmonia, glorious choral work by Wilhelm Pitz's Philharmonia Chorus and some extraordinarily fine solo singing (Peter Pears as the Evangelist, Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau as Christ, alongside Elisabeth Schwarzkopf, Christa Ludwig, Nicolai Gedda and Walter Berry) make for an overwhelming musical and spiritual experience. Sure, it sounds nothing like Bach as performed today; but of all the great composers, Bach's message can transcend the medium nearly every time.

Karajan was always a great **Sibelius** champion, and while these days we've become used to a cooler, less dense

THE RECORDINGS

- Rachmaninov. Ravel** Piano Concertos
Michelangeli
Warner Classics ⓑ 2435 67238-2
- Prokofiev** Violin Concertos **Oistrakh**
Warner Classics ⓑ 2435 62888-2
- Various Cpsrs** Piano Works **Lipatti**
Warner Classics ⓑ 2435 66988-2
- Bizet** Orchestral Works **Beecham**
Warner Classics ⓑ 2435 67231-2
- Villa-Lobos** Bachianas Brasileiras **Villa-Lobos**
Warner Classics ⓑ 2435 66912-2
- Gershwin** Orchestral Works **Previn**
Warner Classics ⓑ 2435 66891-2
- Satie** Piano Works **Ciccolini**
Warner Classics ⓑ 2435 67239-2
- Dvořák** Piano Concerto **Schubert** Wanderer
Fantasy **Richter; C Kleiber**
Warner Classics ⓑ 2435 66895-2
- Schubert** String Quartets **Alban Berg Qt**
Warner Classics ⓑ ② 2564 61234-7
- Haydn** String Quartets **Alban Berg Qt**
Warner Classics ⓑ ③ 2564 61234-5
- Beethoven** String Quartets **Alban Berg Qt**
Warner Classics ⓑ ③ 2434 76820-2
- Bach** Cello Suites **Tortelier**
Warner Classics ⓑ ② 2435-62878-2
- Milhaud** Orchestral Works **Bernstein**
Warner Classics ⓑ 9463 45808-2
- Vivaldi** Choral Works **Muti**
Warner Classics ⓑ 9990 85223-2
- Bach** St Matthew Passion **Klemperer**
Warner Classics ⓑ ② 2435 67538-2
- Sibelius** Orchestral Works **Karajan**
Warner Classics ⓑ 2434 76846-2
- Mozart** Clarinet Concerto, etc **Meyer**
Warner Classics ⓑ 2435 66897-2
- Glazunov. Prokofiev. Shchedrin**
Orchestral Works **Mutter; Rostropovich**
Warner Classics ⓑ 2564 61313-6
- Mozart** Piano Concertos **Argerich;**
Rabinovitch Warner Classics ⓑ 2564 61313-4

orchestral sound, he did have a wonderful engagement with the composer's language. Six of Sibelius's shorter orchestral works (*En saga*, *The Swan of Tuonela*, *Karelia Suite*, *Finlandia*, *Valse triste* and *Tapiola*) make a decent programme and the playing, it hardly needs saying, is very fine. Even if these German musicians weren't instinctive Sibelians, you'd never know it, and they phrase with incredible elegance.

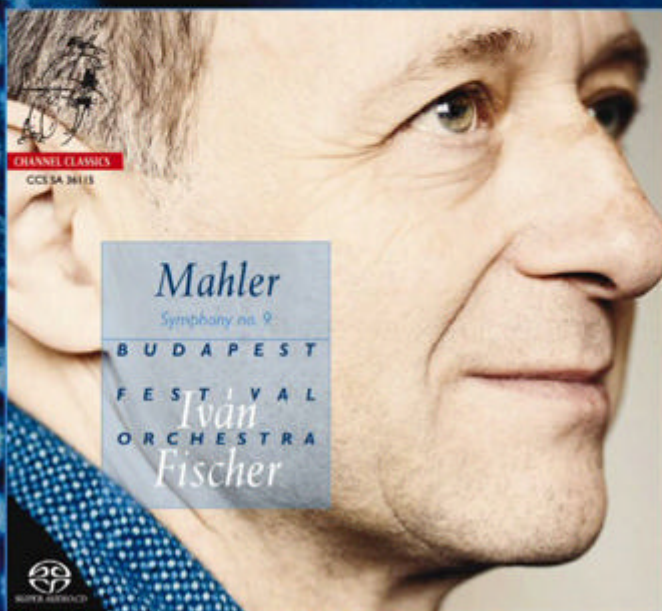
Sabine Meyer's **Mozart** Clarinet Concerto and wind *Sinfonia concertante* with the Staatskapelle Dresden under Hans Vonk is a perfectly enjoyable recording – I think her later version of the concerto with Abbado is superior – and the *Sinfonia concertante* never fails to entrance. So a qualified welcome.

I found the Anne-Sophie Mutter Russian disc (the **Glazunov** and **Prokofiev** First violin concertos) with Rostropovich conducting

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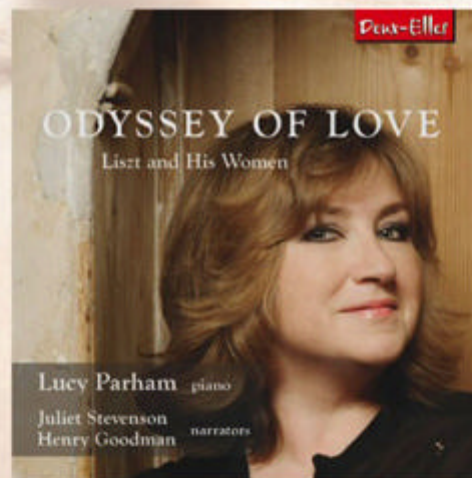
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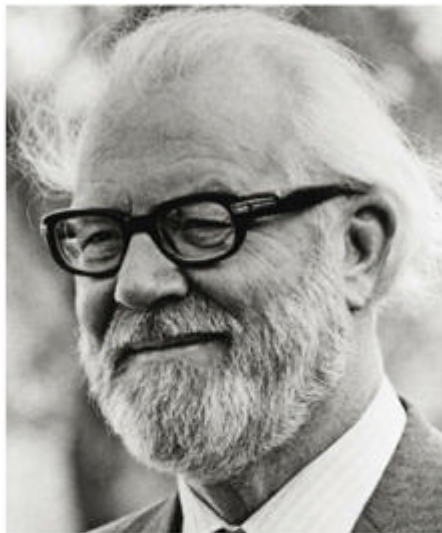
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the National Symphony Orchestra of Washington DC, originally recorded for Erato, strangely unconvincing. This isn't repertoire with which I'd associate her, and even with Rostropovich's charismatic partnership it just fails to gel. She certainly plays with a great deal more freedom and fantasy than I'd expect, and with some pretty dramatic contrasts of both dynamic and tempo, but the sound catches a slightly unappealing edge to her tone which I've never heard her make live. That said, **Rodion Shchedrin's** *Stikbira* – at 22 minutes longer than either of the concertos – makes quite an impression, a long passacaglia-like piece for orchestra that celebrates a millennium of Christianity in Russia.

Last but not least, three **Mozart** piano concertos with Martha Argerich as soloist in two of them – on her own in the D minor, K466, and alongside Alexandre Rabinovitch in the Double, K365 (Rabinovitch is the soloist in the F major, K459). Argerich never disappoints and certainly doesn't here (though for K466 her much later recording with Abbado is the one to go for). She's at her most delightful in the Double Concerto, making music with friends, and the Württemberg CO are sprightly partners. Rabinovitch is the soloist and conductor in K459 and gives a delightful performance.

The English conductor **Sir Charles Groves** was born 100 years ago and, to mark his centenary, Warner Classics, as the new patrons of the EMI catalogue, have issued a 24-CD set in his honour. Considering that Groves is all but unknown in France, it seems a bit odd having the very short booklet-note translated into French and German; better surely to have paid the excellent Martin Cotton a bit more, given him three times the space for his note and saved the translators' fees. The booklet doesn't contain a detailed list of the contents either: for that you have to look at the individual sleeves or use the abbreviated listing on the back. In the grand scheme of things that's probably no major hardship but, slightly confusingly, a couple of large works (*A Mass of Life* and *Koanga*) start on the disc *before* the one that carries the original sleeve-art, so look at their backs rather than their fronts!

Gripes out of the way, this is a fine memento of a major figure in British musical life. I suspect the reason he's not better known is that he was preceded by the likes of Boult, Barbirolli and Beecham, and was followed by Hickox and Handley, falling into that strange no-man's-land between the truly historic and the modern



Celebrating Sir Charles Groves in his centenary year

'Groves always seemed to find the right tempo and mood for everything'

(ie digital). Like Vernon Handley, Groves was a devoted champion of British music, as well as being a wonderfully collaborative musician (no surprise that he conducted for the Leeds Competition), and he recorded extensively. And whatever he conducted you felt that what he was giving you was what was written on the page – he seemed to find the right tempo and mood for everything.

Groves was an important Delius interpreter and six discs are devoted to his music. Beecham was a tough act to follow in Delius, and Groves was as aware of this as anyone. But Beecham often achieved his glorious and seemingly effortless phrasing and diaphanous textures by taking the music at a slower tempo than the score's marking, or by adopting quite extreme tempos. Groves offered an equally valid approach and succeeded in making this music sing with an attractive sense of ebb and flow. He was also very sensitive to orchestral balance – Delius's writing for the brass can threaten to swamp everything if not kept in check (and the more modern sound Groves was given makes this even more of a risk). Take *Paris* or *Eventyr*, with the RLPO (which Groves led from 1963 to 1977), and you have an object lesson in adhering to the letter of the score but still drawing magic from this elusive music. *Sea Drift* (with John Noble) is – interestingly – slower than Beecham's and is a powerful, if not searing experience, and Noble sings with authority and beautiful diction. *A Mass of Life* receives a fine performance (probably since challenged by Hickox). The *Songs of Sunset* are rather plain but are given distinction

by the glorious singing of Janet Baker and John Shirley-Quirk. *Koanga*, rarely heard either on stage or on disc, receives a terrific performance: Christopher Palmer's review in the June 1974 *Gramophone* is well worth reading for its detail and affection. Groves conducts the LSO here (the bulk of these discs are with the RPO or RLPO).

Edward Elgar's music takes up another half-dozen discs which, apart from the *Enigma* Variations and the Violin Concerto (with Hugh Bean – warm, affectionate, thoughtful, simply lovely), tend to focus on shorter or lesser-known works. Groves does them all with great style and, where appropriate, a feel for their ceremonial weight. Groves was quite happy to conduct 'lighter' fare, too – the disc and a half of Eric Coates is done with great flair and a winning lightness of touch. And he does a splendid job with Walton film suites and various overtures.

Of the rarities here, Vaughan Williams's opera *Hugh the Drover* receives a strong performance, with Robert Tear powerful in the title-role and Sheila Armstrong touching as his beloved Mary. It's strongly cast and beautifully produced. Groves's recording of Havergal Brian's Symphonies Nos 8 and 9 continues to have the catalogue to itself. This is remarkable, at times visionary music and Groves does it proud, tuning in to the often strange sonorities. The Eighth is a symphony he'd conducted a number of times before recording it and it shows, but the Ninth receives a worthy performance too. Bliss's *A Colour Symphony* is vivid, and his *Morning Heroes*, with John Westbrook an eloquent and characterful narrator, is something of a classic. And don't overlook his marvellous disc of music by Frank Bridge (*Cherry Ripe*, *Enter Spring*, *Lament*, *Summer* and *The Sea*): really magnificent music performed with fire and passion.

Groves gave the premiere of Malcolm Arnold's Second Symphony in 1953 and his recording, made in 1976 with the Bournemouth SO, is very fine, the seemingly contradictory sides of the composer's personality and musical language beautifully balanced. The two sets of Arnold's *English Dances* make for a lively coupling.

Priced somewhere between £55 and £60, this is a fine memento of a man who did a great service to British music and made Liverpool a major destination for classical music at more or less the same time that four young Liverpudlians were doing the same for pop music. **G**

THE RECORDINGS

Sir Charles Groves British Music Groves

Warner Classics © (24 discs) 2564 61472-4

Opera



David Vickers reviews a countertenor-heavy opera by Leonardo Vinci:

'A Papal decree forbade women from performing, so the original cast featured four castrati, two of whom sang the female characters' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 88**



Philip Kennicott on Wuorinen's *Brokeback Mountain* on DVD:

'The characters and the bleak narrative of Proulx's short story now operate almost at the level of myth' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 91**

Gasparini

Il Bajazet

Leonardo De Lisi *ten.*..... **Bajazet**

Filippo Mineccia *counterten.*..... **Tamerlano**

Giuseppina Bridelli *mez.*..... **Asteria**

Ewa Gubańska *mez.*..... **Irene**

Antonio Giovannini *counterten.*..... **Andronico**

Benedetta Mazzucato *mez.*..... **Clearco**

Raffaele Pé *counterten.*..... **Leone**

Giorgia Cinciripi *sop.*..... **Zaida**

Auser Musici / Carlo Ipata

Glossa © ③ GCD923504 (3h 25' • DDD • S/T/t)



Handel completed *Tamerlano* in advance of the 1724-25 season, but the tenor

Francesco Borosini's arrival in London prompted Handel to recompose large swathes of the music and restructure the libretto, because Borosini showed him a version by Francesco Gasparini that he had sung at Reggio Emilia in 1719. A staged production of this work in Tuscany last summer led to this premiere recording.

Carlo Ipata conducts with a thoughtful ear for detailed phrasing and Auser Musici provide graceful orchestral playing. Bajazet's suicide scene at the climax of the opera (one of the biggest elements to influence Handel) is sung by Leonardo De Lisi with a firm hint of baritone in the voice. Filippo Mineccia makes a few surreptitious hints at the instability of Tamerlano's infatuation for Asteria in 'Se la gloria ai tuoi bei lumi' (including a discreet pair of oboes), and his explosive fury as the opera reaches towards its tragic climax is communicated boldly in 'A dispetto' (featuring a pair of rasping horns; this is perhaps the one moment where Gasparini's musical response to the text is a match for Handel's). Giuseppina Bridelli performs Asteria's 'Cor di padre' resolutely, and it concludes Act 2 with a flourish, thanks to Sebastiano Severi's animated *concertante* cello (the music couldn't be more different from Handel's setting of the text, which he moved to the start of Act 3).

Tamerlano's jilted fiancée Irene was sung in 1719 by the young Faustina Bordoni; her gently naive 'Viena, vola' is sung beguilingly by Ewa Gubańska, accompanied for long stretches by only Rosella Croce's whispered violin obbligato. Irene's reaction to Tamerlano's faithlessness might have been delivered with a harder-edged vigour ('Ti sento sì'), but when her fortunes rise again she sings a charming Venetian-style *pizzicato* song ('Non è sì fido al nido'). The Greek prince Andronico's strained hope of finding happiness with Asteria is conveyed sentimentally by Antonio Giovannini in 'Con dolci prieghi e pianti'. The secondary character Clearco (omitted by Handel) has some of the best arias: a pair of recorders illustrate a moth seeking joy near the light in the trippingly attractive 'La farfalletta', whereas the lament 'Morte non è agli amanti' has sorrowful chromatic strings (both arias are sung sweetly by Benedetta Mazzucato). Leone's contemplative pastoral aria 'Rondinella che si vede' is sung sensitively by Raffaele Pé.

The set is essential for anyone wanting to better understand the source material that inspired Handel's genius; but of course it also reveals some considerable merits of Gasparini, hitherto best known as the *maestro di coro* at Venice's Ospedale della Pietà who absconded in 1713, leaving Vivaldi to carry the can. **David Vickers**

Metcalfe

Under Milk Wood

Elizabeth Donovan, Helen-Jane Howells,

Gweneth-Ann Jeffers *sops* **Karina Lucas** *mez*

Wyn Davies, Eamonn Mulhall *tens* **Richard Morris,**

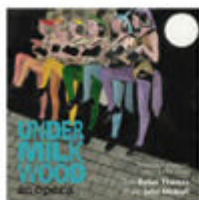
Paul Carey Jones *bars* **Michael Douglas Jones**

bass-bar **Jose Zalba-Smith** *fls* **Parmela Attariwala**

vn/va **Deian Rowlands** *hp* **Paul Stoneman** *perc*

Wyn Davies *org/pt/synth*

Tŷ Cerdd © ② TCR013 (109' • DDD)



Dylan Thomas's *Under Milk Wood* must be the most celebrated radio play of all time.

The original 1954 BBC broadcast and the unabridged 1963 remake, both with Richard Burton, are classics in their field and show how much can be achieved by sound without the aid of vision – the sounds of Thomas's inimitable, richly alliterative poetic style above all, but also the atmospheric sound world of a skilful radio production. Is this a work asking to become an opera? Or would an operatic setting add one sound layer too many?

On stage, John Metcalf's opera received a warm welcome at its premiere in Swansea and on tour last year. This CD recording, made during the initial run of performances, inevitably invites closer comparison with the original radio play. It is hard to argue with Metcalf's decision to cut Thomas's text, as the complete play is too long to be set to music, though it is a shame that the text has been reordered and the narrative divided up differently between the singers. It was another good choice to keep the music transparent, much as Britten did when he set Shakespeare in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. This makes sure that a decent proportion of the words can be heard, and also that the music does not fight against the poetic richness of the language.

Beyond that, the opera does not venture far. Metcalf sets the words as recitative with occasional flowering into an arioso where Thomas offers a song, while his little band of five instrumentalists – violin or viola, keyboards, harp, flute and percussion – scampers about with a nicely light touch, whimsical in tone rather than overtly funny. A dream-like atmosphere pervades much of the score, which is reasonable enough, but hardly a single idea is memorable. Nothing in the music pinpoints the perturbation in Coronation Street or the lazy Sunday on Llareggub Hill so that we recognise where we are. One group of townsfolk is apt to sound much like another. The people and places do not really come alive in the mind's eye.

The performance is lively, though a couple of the singers sound strained at times, and the balance wisely keeps the voices close. In many ways this makes an

attractive addition to the small-scale opera repertoire, but the obvious comparison does present a problem. Metcalf's opera is charming, affectionate, diverting. Thomas's radio play is a great listening experience.

Richard Fairman

Mozart

Die Zauberflöte

Richard Lewis *ten*.....Tamino
 Joan Carlyle *sop*.....Pamina
 Joan Sutherland *sop*.....Queen of the Night
 Geraint Evans *bar*.....Papageno
 Jenifer Eddy *sop*.....Papagena
 David Kelly *bass*.....Sarastro
 Hans Hotter *bass-bar*.....Speaker
 Robert Bowman *ten*.....Monostatos
 Judith Pearce *sop* Josephine Veasey *mez*
 Monica Sinclair *contr*.....Three Ladies
 Margaret Neville, Ann Hood, Marion Roberts *sops*.....Three Boys
 John Dobson *ten* Ronald Lewis *bar*.....Two Priests
 Edgar Evans *ten* Victor Godfrey *bass-bar*.....Two Armed Men

Chorus and Orchestra of the Royal Opera House,
 Covent Garden / Otto Klemperer
 Testament mono ② SBT2 1504 (159' • ADD)
 Recorded live, January 4, 1962



As with Klemperer's *Fidelio*, this live performance from Covent Garden – which now appears on disc for the first time – preceded a studio recording with the Philharmonia. But whereas the studio *Fidelio* retained some of the spoken dialogue, *Die Zauberflöte*, with a completely new cast, was issued with no dialogue at all. It's wonderful, with the Three Ladies led by Elisabeth Schwarzkopf, and the Queen of the Night of one's dreams in Lucia Popp, but it's no drama. Here we have the real theatrical experience.

It's not perfect, of course. Klemperer's speeds, which are much as on the later recording, caused problems here and there: most notably in the choral 'O Isis und Osiris', where the orchestra and the chorus are at odds. David Kelly gets behind for a moment in his 'O Isis' and struggles a bit in 'In diesen heil'gen Hallen', while Joan Sutherland is ahead of the beat in her first aria; but it's really not too serious. It would be a mistake to assume that Klemperer is always slow: there's a delightful bounce to the *Allegro* of the Overture (with a splendidly brassy coda), and the duet for Pamina and Papageno flows beautifully.

Sutherland makes a disappointing Queen: both her arias are transposed down, and 'Der Hölle Rache' is clumsy. On the

other hand, Joan Carlyle never puts a foot wrong. She is heartfelt in 'Ach, ich fühl's', impassioned when about to kill herself, rapturous when put straight by the Three Boys. The booklet-note by Tony Locantro (who was in the audience) doesn't mention David Kelly, but his Sarastro is noble, secure even at the bottom of his range. The Speaker is Hans Hotter, in excellent voice.

Above all, we have Richard Lewis and Geraint Evans. Lewis sings a lovely, ardent Portrait aria and makes the exchange with the Speaker one of the highlights of the performance: despairing at 'So ist denn alles Heuchelei' where Nicolai Gedda on the studio recording is outraged. Evans, in complete command of the audience, is funny and touching. The track list needs amending to credit the unmistakable voice of John Dobson in the dialogue. Excellent sound. I listened with a smile on my face and a tear in my eye; there should have been a rainbow. **Richard Lawrence**

Selected comparison:

Philb Orch, Klemperer

(11/64th) (EMI) 966793-2 or 404378-2

Mozart

'Opera Arias & Overtures'

La clemenza di Tito – Overture; S'altro che lacrime.
Così fan tutte – Overture; Ei parte...Per pietà.
Don Giovanni – Overture; Batti, batti; Vedrai, carino. **La finta giardiniera** – Overture; Appena mi vedon. **Idomeneo** – Overture; Quanti mi siete intorno...Padre, germani, addio!. **Le nozze di Figaro** – Overture; Giunse alfin il momento...
 Deh vieni non tardar

Elizabeth Watts *sop*

Scottish Chamber Orchestra / Christian Baldini
 Linn ② CKD460 (61' • DDD • T/t)



In Covent Garden's recent *Don Giovanni* Elizabeth Watts threatened to steal the

show with her alluringly sensuous Zerlina. Even without her delightful stage presence, you can hear why in 'Batti, batti' and 'Vedrai carino', both sung here with a seductive tenderness devoid of soubrettish pouts and simpers. In Susanna's 'Deh vieni non tardar', too, Watts catches a specific quality of amorous yearning, shading to a dream of future bliss in the final bars – though she seems to want to take the aria a notch slower than conductor Christian Baldini. Since her debut disc of Schubert Lieder (RCA, 2/09), Watts's lyric soprano has gradually ripened and deepened without losing its purity. With its admixture of mezzo warmth allied to secure, shining

high notes, hers is now an ideal Fiordiligi voice. In 'Per pietà' her technical mastery (immaculate runs, precipitous leaps taken with poise) and urgency of feeling make one eager to hear her in the role on stage – and frustrated that she does not also include Fiordiligi's imperious 'Come scoglio'.

Watts's intense and, again, specifically characterised singing of Ilia's opening number in *Idomeneo*, outrage and anguish softening only the major-keyed music of the aria, likewise whets the appetite to hear her in the complete opera. On this evidence her fire and spirit would be a match for any Elettra. She and Baldini surely miss a trick, though, by omitting the first half of Ilia's accompanied recitative, designed to follow the quiet, ominous close of the Overture without a break. If you know the opera, the hiatus will come as a mild shock. But Watts's deeply felt singing, here and elsewhere, and the colourful playing of the Scottish Chamber Orchestra in the overtures, their sinewy, period-influenced Mozartian style honed under Mackerras, are fair compensation.

The track that moved me most of all was the exquisite minuet song in which Servilia pleads to Vitellia to confess her guilt to the Emperor Titus – a cathartic moment in the opera. Watts chooses an unusually broad tempo (shades here of the *Adagio* of Mozart's Clarinet Concerto), and vindicates it with the mingled grace and unexaggerated fervour of her singing, the orchestra swelling and ebbing in delicate sympathy. **Richard Wigmore**

Rameau

Castor et Pollux

Colin Ainsworth *ten*.....Castor
 Florian Sempy *bar*.....Pollux
 Emmanuelle de Negri *sop*.....Télaire
 Clémentine Margaine *mez*.....Phébé
 Sabine Devieille *sop*.....Cléone
 Christian Immier *bar*.....Jupiter
 Philippe Talbot *ten*.....Athlete
 Virgile Ancely *bass-bar*.....High Priest

Ensemble Pygmalion / Raphaël Pichon

Harmonia Mundi ② HMC90 2212/13
 (140' • DDD • S/T/t)



Castor et Pollux, Rameau's third opera, was first performed at the Paris Opéra

in 1737. Preceded by an old-fashioned Prologue for gods and goddesses, the action began with the Spartans mourning the death of Castor. Pollux descends to Hades to get his half-brother back; at the end, Jupiter

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elevates both to the Heavens. The opera racked up 21 performances but it was less well received than *Hippolyte et Aricie* and *Les Indes galantes*. Rameau returned to it after an unusually long gap: the revised version, recorded here, was staged in 1754. Out went the Prologue, and the living Castor appeared in a new first act, to the great advantage of the drama. Telaira is due to marry Pollux but loves Castor. Pollux nobly resigns his claim, to the fury of Phoebe, who is herself in love with Castor. Phoebe arranges for Telaira to be abducted; this fails but Castor is killed. Jupiter permits Pollux to rescue Castor from Hades, provided he takes his brother's place. Castor agrees to the exchange but only so that he can bid farewell to Telaira, after which he will return to the Underworld. Not surprisingly, Telaira gives him a hard time over this, but Jupiter descends and everyone is happy – except for Phoebe, who kills herself.

The revision was a great success. There are Italian elements in the score – *da capo* arias, roudades on key words – but essentially this is a superb example of a French *tragédie en musique*. What it lacks is a powerful exit for the unhappy Phoebe; her 'Castor revoit le jour' doesn't quite cut it, though admittedly it's rather under-characterised by Clémentine Margaine (it's omitted on Kevin Mallon's Naxos recording). As usual with Rameau, the dance music is a delight, and it's beautifully played. Another pleasure is the high-quality casting of Philippe Talbot and Sabine Devicilhe in minor roles. As on the Naxos recording, Castor is sung by Colin Ainsworth. Eleven years on, his voice is still in excellent shape, the top notes light and unforced, while his declaiming of the text sounds free and natural. It is a surprise, and a pity, that he is deprived of 'Tendre amour' at the end. He and Florian Sempey, a vigorous Pollux, are movingly tender when they meet in Hades. Emmanuelle de Negri is wonderfully intense in 'Tristes apprêts', the opera's most famous number. It sounds as though two or more bassoons are playing: on the Mallon recording it's a solo player, who is even more touching. The chorus and orchestra under Raphaël Pichon are first-rate; the harpsichord continuo is hard to make out. All in all this is a splendid achievement, but I wouldn't wish to be without the Naxos. **Richard Lawrence**

Selected comparison:

Aradia Ens, Mallon (5/04) (NAXOS) 8 660118/19

Reimann

Lear

Bo Skovhus *bar*..... **König Lear**
Katja Pieweck *mez*..... **Goneril**
Hellen Kwon *sop*..... **Regan**
Siobhan Stagg *sop*..... **Cordelia**

Erwin Leder *spkr*..... **Narr**
Lauri Vasar *bar*..... **Graf von Gloster**
Andrew Watts *counterten*..... **Edgar**
Martin Homrich *ten*..... **Edmund**
Christian Miedl *bar*..... **Herzog von Albany**
Peter Galliard *ten*..... **Herzog von Cornwall**
Jürgen Sacher *ten*..... **Graf von Kent**
Wilhelm Schwinghammer *bass*.....

..... **König von Frankreich**
Frieder Stricker *voc*..... **Servant**

Hamburg State Opera Chorus; Hamburg Philharmonic Orchestra / Simone Young

Stage director **Karoline Gruber**

Video director **Marcus Richardt**

ArtHaus Musik (P) DVD 109 063; (P) 109 064

(156' • NTSC • 16:9 • 1080i • DTS-HD MA5.1,

DD5.1 & PCM stereo • 0 • S/s)

Recorded live 2014

Sallinen

King Lear

Matti Salminen *bass*..... **King Lear**
Lilli Paasikivi *mez*..... **Cordelia**
Taina Piira *sop*..... **Goneril**
Satu Vihavainen *sop*..... **Regan**
Petri Lindroos *bar*..... **Albany**
Jorma Hynninen *bar*..... **Gloucester**
Kai Pitkänen *ten*..... **Cornwall**
Aki Alamikkotervo *ten*..... **The Fool**
Sauli Tiilikainen *bar*..... **Edgar**
Jorma Silvasti *ten*..... **Edmund**
Hannu Forsberg *bass*..... **France**

Finnish National Opera Chorus and Orchestra /

Okko Kamu

Stage director **Kari Heiskanen**

Online (P) DVD ODV4010

(164' • NTSC • 16:9 • PCM stereo • 0 • s)

Recorded live 2002



Aulis Sallinen's *Kuningas Lear* – from a translation of the play by Matti Rossi – was filmed in 2002 at a revival of its Finnish premiere production. Given some time-travel updating of its audience's harmonic appreciation, this team's approach to the play could have sat well at the Paris Opéra of the 1850s. Shakespeare's narrative is followed more literally and patiently than by Reimann and adaptor/librettist Claus H Henneberg in their *Lear*. In a work lasting less than three hours, Sallinen and Rossi use over half an hour just getting to the end of Lear's division-of-the-kingdom opening. Shakespeare is even augmented as their Fool – a singing role unlike chez their German rivals – gets a Prologue of his own.

In contrast, Reimann and Henneberg can't wait to get going with the

psychological crises. Their *Lear*'s score is based on quick-moving accompanied recitative with underlaying or interposed instrumental mood and atmospheric descriptions. Brass and wind have that 20th-century prominence as if they've swapped roles with the strings, while there's a distinctive, large and colourful percussion group. Sallinen/Rossi, however, give themselves time to lay out character types in music (the 'bad' daughters are like rival prima donnas from some Mozart Singspiel) from which arias could be extracted and melodies (try the Act 2 reunion of Lear and Cordelia, and its final scene reprise) quite readily remembered. The impression, from a more Romantic strings-and-wind-based instrumental group, is altogether more lyrical, although Sallinen the colourist symphony composer can produce upsetting sonorities where necessary: try the spooky, mostly quiet 'Forest' in Act 2 where we first see Lear's madness with Edgar as Poor Tom – the scene that Verdi said he was scared of composing.

The energy and pace of the Reimann bear witness to its creators' engagement with their subject. Their version feels less a setting of another's masterpiece than a subject they're realising themselves. That's emphasised in this Hamburg performance. Simone Young (and Skovhus, her virtuoso interpreter of the title-role) sculpts a more extreme, more *Wozzeck*-like reading of the score than Gerd Albrecht did originally (and on DG's premiere recording – 9/79, 9/00) with a more sorrowfully lyrical Fischer-Dieskau. Young is also especially attentive to dynamics and dramatic structure. Karoline Gruber's stage production uses well-tried Brechtian devices – for example, partners in duet not talking directly to each other, very effective in the Lear-Cordelia reunion, where Erwin Leder's sad-faced Fool embodies Cordelia (as perhaps in stagings Shakespeare saw). This taps the mood of the play more harrowingly than the pretty Pre-Raphaelitism and naturalistic acting of Ponnelle's premiere staging (excerpts on YouTube).

The Sallinen's Finnish cast is impressive, albeit in a more conventional production context (Kari Heiskanen, with some influence from the too little-known Peter Brook film). I don't know the order in which the work was composed, but Sallinen's timing of the action seems to click into a higher gear from the end of Act 1 scene 2 where bastard Edmund 'deposes' Edgar from the Gloucester family inheritance. There is some classy singing from Salminen in the title-role (less physically involved than Skovhus, although his stage presence and

final death fall are remarkable), Silvasti's disturbed, neurotic Edmund, Jorma Hynninen's less-is-more Gloucester and Lilli Paasikivi's heart-and-soul Cordelia.

Having waited for all of the 19th century (Berlioz, then Verdi?) and much of the 20th (Britten?) for a setting of Shakespeare's *King Lear* from a major operatic composer, the gods, London bus-like, suddenly delivered two in 1978 and 2000. They are both remarkable and remarkably different, and hugely recommended. **Mike Ashman**

Rossini

Guillaume Tell

Nicola Alaimo bar..... **Guillaume Tell**
Marina Rebeka sop..... **Mathilde**
Juan Diego Flórez ten..... **Arnold**
Simon Orfila bass-bar..... **Walter Furst**
Simone Alberghini bass-bar..... **Melchtal**
Amanda Forsythe sop..... **Jemmy**
Veronica Simeoni mez..... **Hedwige**
Luca Tittoto bass..... **Gessler**
Celso Albalo ten..... **Ruodi**
Alessandro Luciano ten..... **Rudolph**
Wojtek Gierlach bass..... **Leuthold/Huntsman**

Chorus and Orchestra of the Teatro Comunale, Bologna / Michele Mariotti

Stage director **Graham Vick**

Video director **Tiziano Mancini**

Decca ② ③ DVD 074 3870DH2; ② ③ 074 3871DH
 (4h 7' + 17' • NTSC • 16:9 • 1080i • DTS-HD MA5.1,
 DTS5.1 & LPCM stereo • O • S/s)

Recorded live at the Rossini Opera Festival, Pesaro, August 2013

Bonus feature: 'William Tell - Behind the Scenes'



Verdi-Wagner year fell in 2013. That was also the year in which two dauntless

Rossini festivals decided

to stage, complete and in French, new productions of *Guillaume Tell*, a work which, in differing degrees, both men admired.

The Rossini in Wildbad production is now on CD (Naxos, 6/15). Would that this Pesaro production were too. Its cast is on a par with that of the classic Gardelli studio recording (EMI, 11/73). Indeed, some might think it superior, given the presence of Juan Diego Flórez, the finest stage Arnold of modern times, here at the very peak of his powers. Sadly, this being DVD, there is also a production to digest.

The idée fixe of director Graham Vick is announced early by the clenched fist on a red ground which decorates the proscenium curtain. Later, as the Austrian overlords meet their fate, Swiss mercenaries are seen silhouetted against the waters of Lake Lucerne brandishing hammers and sickles, and flying the

obligatory red flag. And there is more. Since Vick has no truck with the pastoral ideal that permeates Rossini's richly imagined realisation of Schiller's original play, he has no qualms about turning the opera's many folk-dance sequences into bespoke horror shows in which white-coated Romanov-style courtiers marmock the country's crippled peasantry.

Both Schiller and Rossini knew that these Swiss patriots were not revolutionaries but conservatives: men whose aim was to preserve 'the old times and the old Switzerland'. The swearing of the Rütli oath in 1291, an event which Rossini places at the heart of his mighty Second Act, was Switzerland's Magna Carta moment. The great trio is finely done here, which is more than can be said for Vick's shambolic staging of the movingly drawn and (until the final call to arms) characteristically quiet massing of the cantons which ends the act.

Vick is at his best directing one-to-one encounters. His production also makes revelatory play of the theme of familial bonds which cuts to Rossini's third and fourth acts (some dating from before the opera's premiere) so cruelly disguise. These include Jemmy's address to his father before the apple-shooting, and the great Act 4 trio, where Jemmy is reunited in hearth-and-home intimacy with his mother and the 'good' Austrian Princess Mathilde. I admire Vick's boldness in allowing Jemmy, vividly played and sung by Amanda Forsythe, to be so powerful a presence in the opera's closing scenes. I also liked the black-and-white home movie of the young Arnold being taught by his father how to plant and sow which plays during Flórez's characteristically fine account of 'Asil héréditaire'.

Nicola Alaimo's burly Tell looks every inch Rossini's Tell: patriot, father, man of peace. And Marina Rebeka is a persuasive Mathilde, despite some occasional blurring of Rossini's crystalline setting of the French text. Pesaro's vast indoor Adriatic Arena offers the kind of factory-style space directors such as Vick relish, though it has a noisy stage and, I suspect, a difficult acoustic. Everything is closely miked, including the rather coarse solo cello which threatens to overtop Alaimo's none too subtle account of Tell's 'Sois immobile'. Michele Mariotti's conducting of his Bologna forces is robust.

Richard Osborne

'Richard Strauss Gala'

Die ägyptische Helena - Zweite Brautnacht!

Arabella - Mein Elemer! Daphne - Ich komme, grüne Brüder. Elektra - Allein! Weh, ganz allein. Feuersnot - Love Scene. Intermezzo -

Symphonic Interlude No 2. Der Rosenkavalier - Waltz Sequences. Salome - Ah! Du wolltest mich nicht deinen Mund küssen lassen, Jochanaan!

Die schweigsame Frau - Overture

Documentary: 'Christian Thielemann: My Richard Strauss', a film by Andreas Morell

Christine Goerke, Anja Harteros,

Camilla Nylund sops **Staatskapelle Dresden / Christian Thielemann**

Video director **Michael Beyer**

C Major Entertainment ② ③ DVD 728908;

② ③ 729004 (101' + 45' • NTSC • 16:9 • 1080i •

DTS-HD MA5.1, DTS5.1 & PCM stereo • O • S)

Recorded live at the Semperoper, Dresden,

June 11, 2014



Numerous fine ideas here – which only half worked. An all-Richard Strauss gala makes sense for Dresden

(one of the composer's strongholds). And who would be better for the task than the well-established Christian Thielemann with a trio of hand-picked singers?

But the concert and the Andreas Morell documentary deliver only some of what is promised. In fact, the concert starts with Christine Goerke singing excerpts from *Elektra* and *Salome* on a high pitch that can't be maintained with less thematically cogent moments from *Daphne*, *Die ägyptische Helena* and *Intermezzo*. As much as I love later Strauss, the composer's fascination with mythology and stratified Viennese society hasn't the heat of earlier works and is less conducive to sampling. One could also question Thielemann's judgement by starting off with the *Rosenkavalier* Waltz Sequence No 1 – the most disjointed of several paraphrases of that opera.

Performance-wise, the Staatskapelle Dresden, with its distinctively mellow sound, is ideal for Strauss, and the singers are mostly well chosen for their appointed arias. After cycling through Handel, *bel canto* and lighter Wagnerian roles, Goerke has emerged as a true dramatic soprano with solid pitch and a firm sense of line. Her *Salome* final scene is well sung but less thoroughly studied than her *Elektra*, in which her lower register conveys deep-lying rage, though there's also a softness to the voice which gives a less obsessive glimpse of a girl who longs for the care of a loving father. Best of all, Goerke's soprano isn't a factory-whistle voice. Less fortunately, she's badly photographed and dressed as if she should be reading bedtime stories rather than screaming for vengeance.

Anja Harteros well externalises the nuances of *Arabella*'s apprehension, although Camilla Nylund seems taxed

to her limits by *Ägyptische Helena*. She's more at home in the final scene from *Daphne*, which inspires special affection from those who know it well, though the contemplative music of the orchestral postlude (while the title-character is turning into a tree) made a curious choice for the ending slot in the gala.

The bonus film comes off like a pre-existing chronological documentary on Strauss's life, with Thielemann shoehorned into it with much second-unit footage of him in and around Dresden and talking at length about the composer. Off the podium, Thielemann isn't terribly personable; and while his observations sound interesting on the surface, I often wondered what, exactly, he was saying. The archival film footage of the late-in-life composer is fascinating but is also found in Eric Schulz's recent documentary 'Richard Strauss at the End of the Rainbow' (C Major DVD 729908), although I find the latter marred by bad pacing and broad, questionable opinions.

David Patrick Stearns

Verdi

Nabucco

Plácido Domingo *bar*.....**Nabucco**
Andrea Carè *ten*.....**Ismaele**
Vitalij Kowaljow *bass*.....**Zaccaria**
Liudmyla Monastyrskya *sop*.....**Abigaille**
Marianna Pizzolato *mez*.....**Fenena**
Robert Lloyd *bass*.....**High Priest**
David Butt Philip *ten*.....**Abdallo**
Duška Bijelić *sop*.....**Anna**

Chorus and Orchestra of the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden / Nicola Luisotti

Stage director **Daniele Abbado**

Video director **Rhodri Huw**

Sony Classical © DVD 88875 05935-9;

© 88875 05936-9 (133' + 9' • NTSC • 16:9 • 1080i • DTS-HD MA5.1, DTS5.1 & LPCM stereo • O • S/s). Recorded live April 2013

Extra features: 'Verdi's First Masterpiece'; 'Plácido Domingo and Liudmyla Monastyrskya on *Nabucco*: the challenges of a new role in opera'



As captured on this DVD, Nicola Luisotti is able to shape the fluency that Antonio Pappano's

orchestra and Renato Balsadonna's chorus have acquired in Verdi into a notably well-paced reading of the composer's first success, even if he is not as bold with the early-period melodramatics of the sometimes Donizettian scoring as Riccardo Muti has always been. This strong company musical performance is a more distinctive achievement than that of

Plácido Domingo's continuing cross-*Fach* assumption of baritone roles – presumably the recording's *raison d'être* – or of Daniele Abbado's staging.

Functional, non-attention-grabbing modern dress and an almost complete lack of physical scenery focus attention firmly on people rather than fantasy recreations of lost Babylon and Jerusalem architecture. That's all to the good in the young Verdi's bold confrontation with major dramatic issues: father-daughter relationships, mental health, religious persecution. Yet, despite certain individual contributions – Monastyrskya's Abigaille absolutely blazes with charisma alongside her steely control of the role's tessitura and tone – the end result as theatre is disappointingly cosy.

Domingo does not manage yet to bring to the title-role here the vocal strength and tone of a Cappuccilli (DG, 7/83), Manuguerra (EMI/Warner, 10/78) or Gobbi (Decca, 5/66). He supplies studied anguish in scenes with his (supposed) daughters and his apparent madness. But we scarcely believe on this showing and hearing that he could terrify a whole people into surrender and exile or commit the blasphemy of declaring himself to be god. His Nabucco does not dominate sufficiently with either sound or vision, although it does fit into the understatement which governs this production. This prevailing tactic seems really effective only at moments such as the stripped-back, stand-and-sing rendition of the 'Va, pensiero' chorus.

Elsewhere, Kowaljow's Zaccaria is less commanding (perhaps read 'melodramatic') of tone and gesture than High Priestly predecessors such as Ghiaurov and Nesterenko. Carè and Pizzolato are a serious, clear Ismaele and Fenena. The production does not lift those characters above supporting roles, leaving more room for Monastyrskya's Abigaille and a little too much for Domingo's gracious but anticlimactic assumption of the title-role.

The small-screen catalogue has several (very) traditional 'biblical' versions of this opera – from La Scala, the Met, Verona and St Margarethen – but really none can be recommended visually except to addicts of camp or tradition. This Sony Classical release offers a fine overall musical achievement, an outstanding leading lady and (perhaps) the collector's interest of a leading tenor working outside his comfort zone. The production is far from stupid but is rarely exciting enough to make for repeatable visual drama.

Mike Ashman

Vinci

Catone in Utica

Juan Sancho *ten*.....**Catone**
Franco Fagioli *counterten*.....**Cesare**
Max Emanuel Cencic *counterten*.....**Arbace**
Valer Sabadus *counterten*.....**Marzia**
Vince Yi *counterten*.....**Emilia**
Martin Mitterrutzner *ten*.....**Fulvio**

Il Pomo d'Oro / Riccardo Minasi

Decca © 478 8194DH3 (3h 53' • DDD • S/T/t)



Max Emanuel Cencic and his production company Parnassus Arts follow up their

trailblazing recording of Vinci's *Artaserse* (Virgin Classics, 1/13) with *Catone in Utica*. This not only further rehabilitates Vinci's reputation but also restores an unabridged and complete first version of Metastasio's libretto, elaborated from Plutarch's account of the staunch Republican patriot Cato's preference for committing suicide rather than submitting to the victorious dictator Julius Caesar. It was premiered in January 1728 in Rome, where a Papal decree forbade women from performing publicly onstage, so the original cast featured four castrati, two of whom sang the female characters: Marzia (Cato's daughter, secretly in love with Caesar but betrothed to Arbace) and Emilia (widow of Caesar's opponent Pompey).

Perhaps it is needless and anachronistic to reconstruct, as here, the Roman all-male cast using countertenors for both female roles, but there is no disputing everyone's complete dedication to the cause. Cencic's firm yet sensitively balanced singing conveys the pathos of Arbace's numerous expressions of unrequited love for Marzia ('Che sia la gelosia' concludes Act 2 with elegant respite from the preceding turbulence). Franco Fagioli's swollen vibrato and exaggerated articulation will not please everyone, but the braying horns and astonishing silent pauses during the valorous 'Soffre talor del vento' suit his aptitude for Caesar's declamatory outbursts; Vinci unleashes high trumpet, two horns and thunderous drums to explosive theatrical effect for Caesar's declaration of war after diplomacy has failed ('Se in campo armato'). Vince Yi sounds appropriately feminine as Emilia but an accomplished female performer might prove a more adequate match for Il Pomo d'Oro's brio in the spirited 'O nel sen di qualche stella'. Likewise, Valer Sabadus's limpid singing does not always reveal every aspect of Marzia's personality evident in Metastasio's poetry and Vinci's



'Studied anguish': Plácido Domingo in the title-role in Daniele Abbado's Royal Opera production of Nabucco, now available on Sony DVD and Blu-ray

music; her breathlessly disorientated description of her troubles during a rushed encounter with Cesare ('Confusa, smarrita') and an extraordinary accompanied recitative as she attempts to flee to safety through a subterranean aqueduct (Act 3 scene 5) are intensely dramatic highlights which a top-notch female singer might have invested with more searing passion (and firmer projection).

Juan Sancho's beefy tenor aptly characterises Cato's scepticism about reaching a diplomatic resolution ('Va', ritorna al tuo tiranno' is a vigorously fugal denunciation of Caesar's emissary), and his infuriated response to his daughter's betrayal has a visceral malevolence comparable to Handel or Mozart at their most potent ('Dovea svenarti allora'). At the other end of the scale, Fulvio's eloquent self-pity in 'Nascesti alle pene' is accompanied by muted upper strings and *pizzicato* basses, although I can imagine it being sung with mellifluous delicacy rather than the 'can belto' ardency of Martin Mitternitzer.

Il Pomo d'Oro, directed by concertmaster Riccardo Minasi, vividly characterise each scene with theatrical zest. The use of forceful guitar strumming in quick arias is tiresome, but otherwise

the continuo team and singers ensure that reams of recitatives crackle along with a vital dramatic atmosphere. The opera's thrilling climax springs some astonishing surprises, with a confrontational quartet followed by a chain of accompanied recitatives for the dying Cato and the remorseful Caesar, who curses his victory and throws down his laurel wreath as the curtain falls (a striking experiment with dramatic realism). Supported by Kurt Markström's scholarly essay, this release boldly champions Vinci's merits as a musical dramatist. **David Vickers**

Weber

Silvana

Michaela Kaune *sop.*.....Mechtilde

Ines Krapp *sop.*.....Clärchen

Ferdinand von Bothmer *ten.*.....

Count Rudolph von Helfenstein

Jörg Schörner *ten.*.....Albert von Cleeburg

Detlef Roth *bar.*.....Count Adelhart

Andreas Burkhart *bar.*.....Fust von Grimm bach

Simon Pauly *bar.*.....Krips

Tareq Nazmi *bass.*.....Kurt

Bavarian Radio Chorus; Munich Radio Orchestra

/ Ulf Schirmer

CPO © 2 CPO777 727-2 (143' • DDD • S/T/t)

Recorded live at the Prinzregententheater,

Munich, April 17 & 18, 2010



There can't be many operas in which the heroine sings not a word. Auber's *La*

Muette de Portici has its place in the history books, both as the virtual origin of *grand opéra* and as a catalyst for the Belgian revolt against the Dutch in 1830. Weber's first surviving opera is less familiar, and actually Silvana is not dumb but enjoined to silence; she does speak at the denouement. This live recording from 2010 was presumably made to mark the bicentenary of the first production in Frankfurt.

The plot hardly merits description, but here goes. Count Rudolph falls in love with the mysterious Silvana, who only responds with gestures. He doesn't love Mechtilde, to whom he is betrothed; and she is in love with Albert von Cleeburg. When Albert claims her hand, revealing himself after victory in a tournament, her father Count Adelhart has him imprisoned: Albert is the son of Adelhart's old enemy, who years before had abducted the count's other daughter Ottilie, long presumed dead. Adelhart wants Mechtilde to marry Rudolph, so Silvana has to be eliminated;

but, guess what, Silvana turns out to be Otilie. Adelhart embraces his 'dear, good daughter' (titters from the audience at this point) and all is resolved satisfactorily.

The libretto by Weber's friend Franz Karl Hiemer is ineptly constructed: Krips, Rudolph's Papageno-like squire, is given three arias, after which he disappears from the action; Kurt and Clärchen sing only in a quartet with Albert and Mechtilde. But the music is well worth hearing. It's particularly fascinating to spot anticipations of the later, mature composer. The huntsmen's chorus is less striking than its equivalent in *Der Freischütz* but Weber deploys his four horns to thrilling effect. Rudolph's first aria looks forward to Max's 'Durch die Wälder' in the same opera, while in the characterisation of Count Adelhart there's more than a touch of the villainous Lysiart in *Euryanthe*. The orchestration is delightful: particularly effective is Weber's use of the oboe and the cello to represent Silvana's unspoken feelings.

The singing is so-so. Ferdinand von Bothmer is effortful in places – mind you, he has to cope with such challenges as a two-octave leap from a bottom A flat – and Michaela Kaune is rather wild in Mechtilde's coloratura. Detlef Roth is too soft-grained for Adelhart's outbursts but he is effective when showing the character's tender side. Simon Pauly makes a lively Krips; in the quartet, Ines Krapp is painfully sharp in an unaccompanied passage – and again, when it's repeated. Chorus, orchestra and conductor are all fine. One oddity is that the singers not only recite the stage directions but describe the action. It's a bit like *Bluebottle* in *The Goon Show* but without Peter Sellers's funny voice.

Richard Lawrence

Wuorinen

Brokeback Mountain

Daniel Okulitch <i>bass-bar</i>	Ennis del Mar
Tom Randle <i>ten</i>	Jack Twist
Heather Buck <i>sop</i>	Alma
Hannah Esther Minuttillo <i>mez</i>	Lureen
Ethan Herschenfeld <i>bass</i>	Aguirre/Hog-Boy
Celia Alcedo <i>sop</i>	Alma's Mother
Jane Henschel <i>mez</i>	Jack's Mother
Ryan MacPherson <i>ten</i>	Jack's Father
Hilary Summers <i>contr</i>	Bartender
Letitia Singleton <i>mez</i>	Saleswoman
Gaizka Gurruchaga <i>ten</i>	Cowboy
Vasco Fracanzani <i>bass</i>	Bill Jones

Chorus and Orchestra of the Teatro Real, Madrid
/ Titus Engel

Stage director Ivo van Hove

Video director Jérémie Cuvillier

Bel Air Classiques © DVD BAC111; © BAC411

(130' + 20' • NTSC • 16:9 • 1080i • DTS-HD MA 5.1, DD5.1 & PCM stereo • 0 • S/s)

Recorded live, February 2014

Bonus: Interview with the artists



Few short stories have become so quickly and so deeply embedded in the American consciousness as Annie Proulx's 1997 *Brokeback Mountain*. First published in *The New Yorker* and made into a critically acclaimed 2005 movie, it now animates a starkly modernist opera by Charles Wuorinen, premiered last year at Madrid's Teatro Real. The characters, and the bleak storyline, now operate almost at the level of myth: we know the narrative arc, the tragic conclusion, even the symbols and speaking tics that define the two cowboys, whose doomed love plays out over decades against the relentlessly hostile backdrop of the conservative American west.

The opera, commissioned by Gerard Mortier and premiered only weeks before his death, received mixed but respectful reviews at its premiere. This DVD makes a strong case both for the original production (by Ivo van Hove) and for the opera itself. The music isn't blithely charismatic like so many contemporary American operas today, and it owes far more to Schoenberg and Berg than to Britten, Bernstein or Copland. If Wuorinen hadn't expressed interest in setting it to music years ago, it would likely have become yet another pastiche-filled work, passed around the regional opera circuit, where its main virtue would have been to offend no one.

Wuorinen's setting reminds one of Monteverdi – formal, stately and psychologically precise, with spare and often angular vocal lines set against prismatic bursts from the orchestra; the accompaniment oscillates between two basic ideas: hushed, sustained figures that suggest the influence of Debussy, and expressionist, often nervous outbursts. The impact is cumulative, by design: the characters, especially the painfully laconic Ennis del Mar (sung by bass-baritone Daniel Okulitch), spend much of the opera groping their way towards self-knowledge and open expression. When Okulitch finally gets there, in the final scenes, he gives a magnificent and deeply powerful performance, capturing all the despair and self-recrimination that makes Proulx's original story so affecting.

Almost equally engaging is tenor Tom Randle, as Jack Twist, who plays the more

self-aware and the more directly lyrical of the two lovers. Jane Henschel has a few short but strikingly humane passages as Jack's mother; Ryan MacPherson, as her husband, convincingly depicts the violence and bitterness of Jack's father. Under the baton of Titus Engel, the Teatro Real orchestra almost disappears into the proceedings, like a crack continuo ensemble in a Baroque drama.

It may be difficult to decide how much Wuorinen's music adds to Proulx's words. It was a masterstroke to ask the original author to write the libretto, which is a free-standing work of literature, both amplifying the original story and adding specifically operatic elements, including a ghost scene and a brutally effective chorus. But in the end, the opera feels like a genuine collaboration, allowing Okulitch especially to carry his doomed character into a different expressive realm than the story or the movie. His Ennis emerges as an Orpheus for a new age of love and loss.

Philip Kennicott

'Agrippina'

Graun Britannico – Se la mia vita, o figlio...

Mi paventi il figlio indegno Handel Agrippina –

Ogni vento...Pensieri, voi mi tormentate...L'alma

mia fra le tempeste Legrenzi Germanico sul

reno – O soavi tormenti dell'alma Magni Nerone

infante – Date all'armi o spiriti fieri Mattheson

Nero – Già tutto valore Orlandini Nerone – Tutta

furie e tutta sdegno Perti Nerone fatto Cesare –

Date all'armi o spiriti fieri; Questo brando, questo

folgore Porpora L'Agrippina – Mormorando anch'io

ruscello...Con troppo fiere immagini Sammartini

Agrippina moglie di Tiberio – Non ho più vele...

Deh, lasciami in pace Telemann Germanicus

Rimembranza crudel

Ann Hallenberg *mez*

Il Pomo d'Oro / Riccardo Minasi

Deutsche Harmonia Mundi © 88875 05598-2

(75' • DDD • T/t)



This disc's title inevitably evokes the stop-at-nothing schemer of Handel's

satirical Venetian opera. But as Ann Hallenberg and her musicologist husband Holger Schmitt-Hallenberg point out in their informative notes, there were no fewer than three Agrippinas in the decadent Roman family: the most famous, and least appetising, Julia Agrippina (or Agrippinilla); her mother, virtuous wife of the hero Germanicus; and her mother's older half-sister, Vipsania Agrippina. Scouring archives in Europe and the US, the Hallenberg duo has assembled an



Daniel Okulitch (left) as Ennis and Tom Randle as Jack in the premiere production of Wuorinen's *Brokeback Mountain*, now on DVD and Blu-ray

entertaining programme of arias from assorted Baroque operas featuring one or other Agrippina, most recorded for the first time.

With her gleaming high mezzo, evenly produced over a wide range, dazzling agility (no hint of aspirates in the realms of coloratura) and specific sense of character, Ann Hallenberg does this trio of ladies proud. The mingled energy and supple ease of her singing in the first number, a cheerfully bellicose aria from Perti's *Nerone fatto Cesare*, sets a template for the whole recital. As the unlovely Julia Agrippina, Hallenberg rants and seethes to thrilling effect in a horn-fuelled bravura aria by Graun. In another 'rage' aria by the almost forgotten Giuseppe Orlandini, she achieves the tricky feat of seeming to go berserk in the *da capo* without coarsening her tone, abetted by percussive, no-holds-barred playing from the ever-lively Il Pomo d'Oro.

In Handel's 'Ogni vento', with its delicious Ländler lilt, Hallenberg exudes a mounting joy at the prospect of making her monster adolescent son Nero emperor. Subtly colouring her tone, she realises each emotional twist and turn of the anguished scena 'Pensieri, voi mi tormentate', where

Handel manages to elicit a measure of sympathy for his anti-heroine.

As Vipsania Agrippina, Hallenberg rides the waves imperiously in a flamboyant nautical aria by Sammartini, egged on by braying trumpets. In the music for her long-suffering half-sister, she warms and softens her tone, whether in a pair of gentle, touching numbers by Porpora or a poignant aria by Telemann, saturated by bittersweet suspensions. The orchestra is closely miked in the resonant acoustic, occasionally to the detriment of the voice. But this barely detracts from an enterprising recital of fine, largely unknown music, performed with style, flair and tonal beauty by a mezzo unsurpassed in Baroque opera today.

Richard Wigmore

'Scene!'

Beethoven Ah! perfido, Op 65 **Haydn** Miseri noi, misera patria, HobXXIVa/7. Scena di Berenice, HobXXIVa/10 **Mendelssohn** Infelice pensier...

Ah, ritorna, età dell'oro, Op 94^b **Mozart** Ch'io mi scordi di te, K505^a. Misera dove son... Ah! non son'io che parlo, K369

Christiane Karg sop

^bAlina Pogostkina vn ^aMalcolm Martineau fp

Arcangelo / Jonathan Cohen

Berlin Classics © 0300646BC (62) • DDD



That indefatigable one-man libretto factory Pietro Metastasio is the linking thread in these scenas of damsels *in extremis*, complemented in *Ch'io mi scordi di te* by the pseudo-Metastasio of *Idomeneo* librettist Gianbattista Varesco. With Beethoven's *Ah, perfido!*, Christiane Karg's expressive lyric soprano edges towards Leonore territory in a bid, as she puts it in the booklet interview, 'to push boundaries, and to test my voice in other registers'. If you've heard Nilsson and Callas in this music, Karg might initially seem underpowered. But we are, after all, still in the 18th century. In close collusion with Jonathan Cohen's crack period band, Karg lives each nuance of the abandoned heroine's fluctuating emotions, from vengeful outrage to morbid pathos. She burns into the Italian consonants in the recitative, spins a tender *legato* in the aria's slow opening section, then flares thrillingly into accusatory fury in the *Allegro*. Throughout, Karg holds vocal finesse and expressive intensity in near-ideal equipoise. Haydn noted in his quaint English that the Italian diva Brigida Banti 'song very

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THE SUNDAY TIMES

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scanty' in the 1795 premiere of his *Scena di Berenice*. He would surely have had no qualms about Karg's performance, whether in the gravely sculpted line of the *Adagio* aria or the passionate abandon of the F minor close, where she unfurls a surprisingly powerful chest register. In *Miseri noi*, Haydn's music is too serenely dignified for such a grim text, but Karg brings it alive in a way I have never heard before, making the coloratura sound desperate, in the right sense, rather than merely brilliant.

In Mozart's ravishing *Ch'io mi scordi di te*, Karg complements the delicate tones of Malcolm Martineau's fortepiano in an unusually intimate performance, softening her naturally bright timbre and ornamenting with taste and discretion. The relative oddball here is the rare Mendelssohn scena in its original London version of 1834: an entertaining piece of near-pastiche, with a slow aria with violin obbligato – silkily expounded by Alina Pogostkina – that sounds like Mozart grown faintly decadent, and a seething *Allegro* that seems to cross Beethoven and Rossini. Karg spits contempt for her faithless lover in the opening recitative, then matches the violin in yearning eloquence before surging with controlled delirium through Mendelssohn's long lines in the *Allegro*. Looking for trouble, I wanted a slightly closer balancing of the fortepiano in *Ch'io mi scordi di te*. But this is nit-picking. Singing with style, grace and fiery temperament, Karg brings each of these distraught heroines excitingly, individually alive, while the superb players of Arcangelo – not least the dulcet clarinets – are true dramatic partners rather than mere accompanists. **Richard Wigmore**

'Sinful Women'

Cherubini Medea – Del fiero duol che il cor mi frange **Mariotte** Salomé – Ah! Je baiserais ta bouche **Massenet** Hérodiade – Ne me refuse pas. Marie-Magdeleine – O mes soeurs **Saint-Saëns** Samson et Dalila – Bacchanale; Mon coeur s'ouvre à ta voix **R Strauss** Elektra – Ich habe keine guten Nächte. Salome – Dance of the Seven Veils **Stravinsky** Oedipus Rex – Nonn' erubescite, reges **Wagner** Parsifal – Ich sah das Kind an seiner Mutter Brust

Dagmar Pecková *mez* **Slovak Philharmonic Orchestra** / **Aleksandar Marković**
Supraphon © SU4181-2 (67' • DDD)



In addition to her operatic and concert career – Mahler a particular speciality – Dagmar Pecková has created a number of 'concept' recitals on Supraphon. The

present programme, premiered as a concert last March in Prague, concentrates on women sinning or being sinned against and was apparently inspired by therapeutic conversations the singer had with psychiatrist William Didden. Didactic notes by Didden himself (in Supraphon's booklet) promote the importance of forgiveness to sinners.

There is a decided French bias here. Usual suspects among lower soprano sinners are supplemented imaginatively by Massenet's Marie-Magdeleine and Hérodiade, Antoine Mariotte's Salomé (written just before Strauss's); the orchestra takes the lead for the *Samson* Bacchanale and (Strauss's) Salome's Dance. In both of these Aleksandar Marković secures well-rehearsed performances showing awareness of how and where these excerpts occur onstage.

Incidentally, the large wordless chorus who 'back' much of Salomé's apostrophe to John the Baptist's head in the Mariotte serve both to take the listener far away from Strauss's more literally violent evocation of the scene and to suggest some of the non-realism of the not-quite-contemporary Ravel *Daphnis et Chloé*. I found myself returning to this excerpt a lot and am anxious to hear the rest of the opera.

Vocally Pecková's dark contralto-ish mezzo is in good shape throughout. She copes quite well with higher-lying passages in the Wagner and Mariotte excerpts. Tone and supportive vocal colour seem to count more for her than pure text – even as Stravinsky's Jocasta, purity of line dominates dramatic intentions. Her singing always seconds the composer's mainstream musical intentions rather than opening possibly productive tensions between text and music – although she is extremely sensitive to dynamics. For some, this will rob Kundry's attempt at seducing Parsifal and Klytemnestra's at recruiting Elektra of that degree of tension that makes a performance special. Throughout the programme we hear superbly and cleanly executed run-throughs, but it is often Marković's players who provide the real dramatic thrust (try the end of *Elektra* here). Also, although Pecková has evidently worked hard on her French, the effect in both the Saint-Saëns and the Mariotte can be mushy and hence more matronly where greater clarity and youth would have helped.

Though not as thrilling as it might have been – I wonder what the live concert was like – this recital, beautifully recorded and balanced, is worth investigating if the repertoire appeals. **Mike Ashman**

'Tempesta'

Handel Agrippina – Overture; *Pensieri*, voi mi tormentate. **Alessandro** – Brilla nell'alma. **Radamisto** – Quando mai spietata sorte. **Serse** – Ombra mai fu **Pergolesi** *Adriano* in Siria – Torbido in volto **Porpora** *Carlo il Calvo* – Spesso di nubi cinto **Vivaldi** *Andromeda liberata* – Sovvente il sole. **Griselda** – Agitata da due venti. *L'olimpiade* – Overture; *Siam navi all'onde algenti*. *La verità in cimento* – Io son fra l'onde

Blandine Staskiewicz *mez*

Les Ambassadeurs / **Alexis Kossenko**

Glossa © GCD923503 (65' • DDD)



Never judge a book by its cover. Mind you, the faux tattoos on Blandine Staskiewicz's

bare shoulders proclaiming 'Tempesta – Handel & Vivaldi' make one of the cringeworthy album covers I've seen in a long while (perhaps the lack of available skin explains why Pergolesi and Porpora aren't mentioned). Quite apart from that, does the world really need yet another 'Ombra mai fu'? Once past the outward impression, you hear Alexis Kossenko and his orchestra Les Ambassadeurs offering superb value as always. 'Spesso di nubi cinto' from Porpora's *Carlo il Calvo* launches proceedings thrillingly, with imaginative orchestral phrasing allied to Staskiewicz's impressively precise and limpidly shaped coloratura, and there's more virtuoso volatility in 'Torbido in volto' from Pergolesi's *Adriano in Siria*.

Staskiewicz sensibly alternates these stormy arias with a judicious assortment of slow ones; there is gentler melodic sensitivity during Vivaldi's 'Sovvente il sole' from the pasticcio *Andromeda liberata*, in which vocal serenity is complemented sympathetically by solo violinist Zefira Valova (who applies a few surprising chromatic embellishments fleetingly). A self-indulgently luxuriant 'Ombra mai fu' almost justifies its existence between the charismatic liveliness of 'Brilla nell'alma' from Handel's *Alessandro* and the lively rustic wittiness of 'Io son fra l'onde' from Vivaldi's *La verità in cimento* (which features Kossenko's vivacious piccolo obbligato). The tormented soliloquy 'Pensieri' from Handel's *Agrippina* and the lovely cavatina 'Quando mai spietata sorte' from *Radamisto* both feature Gilles Vansons's poignant oboe-playing. I do not always sense tangible engagement with dramatic characterisations, but the nuanced vibrancy from Staskiewicz and Les Ambassadeurs in the tempestuous 'Siam navi all'onde algenti' from Vivaldi's *Olimpiade* is irresistible. **David Vickers**

REPLAY

Rob Cowan's monthly survey of historic reissues and archive recordings

String players to savour

Broadcast treasures from the Richard Itter library, plus historic concertos and quartets

This month sees an especially rich trawl of first-release 'historicals', exceptional performances in excellent sound. Probably the most exciting issue is from Lyrita, the first in what promises to be a whole series of rich pickings in the 'Itter Broadcast Collection'. Lyrita's founding father Richard Itter made hundreds of radio recordings, starting in 1952 and covering a plethora of rare repertoire. This first double-pack, which is devoted to **British Violin and Cello Concertos**, opens with Arthur Benjamin's energetic and likeable Violin Concerto of 1932 in a lively and communicative performance by Derek Collier with the BBC Northern Orchestra under Stanford Robinson.

Bax's Concerto from six years later is stronger meat, with an especially lovely central movement, and I have never heard a better performance of it than the

'Lyrita's founding father Richard Itter made hundreds of radio recordings covering a plethora of rare repertoire'

one André Gertler gave with the BBC Symphony Orchestra under Sir Malcolm Sargent. Sargent and his orchestra are also at the helm for the 1957 European premiere of Walton's Cello Concerto with its dedicatee Gregor Piatigorsky, whose full, warm tone makes a strong impression, a performance I'd rate as marginally more compelling (if less well recorded) than Piatigorsky's premiere (Boston) recording under Charles Munch.

But perhaps the highlight of the set is Alfredo Campoli's 1959 performance of Moeran's Violin Concerto (1942), where the music's Celtic heritage is vividly suggested and Campoli's tone and phrasing are consistently beautiful. Granted Lyrita recently reissued their own commercial stereo recording of the work with John Georgiadis (and the LSO under Vernon Handley) as part of a fine collection of 'British String Concertos' (four CDs, 2/15) which, although excellent in its own right – and a good deal more leisurely than the Campoli version (34'44" as opposed to 31'55") – isn't quite as poetic or animated as the Campoli, which I would place on a par with the violinist's recordings of the Elgar and Bliss concertos. It's also good to see a first release featuring the much-underrated Rudolf Schwartz, again with the BBC SO. Now there's a name I'd like to see appear again in the series. I can hardly wait to see what else might be in store from this exciting source.

Two more CDs from the Hänssler stable are well worth investigating. Violinist **Johanna Martzy** was hardly a prolific recording artist, which makes her few radio recordings desirable bonuses, even if, as in this case, they duplicate repertoire we already have from her on disc. A coupling of Mozart's Third and Fourth Violin Concertos, from 1962 and 1956 respectively, both featuring sturdy support from the Stuttgart Radio Symphony Orchestra under Hans Müller-Kray, exhibits Martzy's forthright approach and

invariable warmth, performances that anticipate the stylistic unfussiness of our own time rather than harking back to the more Romantic manners of Martzy's era.

I was especially happy to see a trio of performances by the **LaSalle Quartet** from SWR Music, Haydn's superb Quartet Op 71 No 2 being given the sort of reading that suggests all four players are absolutely on the button in terms of Haydn's rigorous style. The *Adagio* is a model of interpretative excellence. Interesting that the recording of Zemlinsky's Third String Quartet pre-dates the LaSalle's DG recording by a few years, when Jack Kirstein was the quartet's cellist rather than the marginally more forthright Lee Fiser. A fine performance, fresh and lyrical: it should win the work many new friends. The vigorous, often radiant performance of Brahms's Third Quartet rather resembles the one in the group's complete set, also for DG. Generally good sound, albeit in mono. **G**

THE RECORDINGS



Various Cpsrs British Vn & Vc Concs

Various artists

Lyrita **B** **2** REAM2114



Mozart Vn Concs Nos 3 & 4
Martzy; Stuttgart RSO / Müller-Kray

Hänssler Classic **M** CD94 230



Brahms. Haydn. Zemlinsky
Stg Qts

LaSalle Quartet

Hänssler Classic **M** CD94 228



Johanna Martzy: a pupil of Nándor Zsolt and Jenő Hubay who made few studio recordings

Szeryng and Rosbaud

Another distinguished violin concerto disc features Polish-born **Henryk Szeryng**, whose 1964 Mercury recording of Schumann's Violin Concerto with Antal Dorati and the LSO (5/65) has always been among my favourites, a combination of brave confrontation and heart-stopping poignancy guaranteed to focus the Concerto's vulnerable spirit. But good as that version is, a 1957 broadcast with the SWR SO Baden-Baden and Freiburg under Hans Rosbaud is even more compelling, the rapport with Rosbaud artistically nourishing. Try the opening *tutti* and note Rosbaud's extra flexibility, the way Szeryng 'speaks' his response. The central *Langsam* is again virtually unparalleled in its lyrical effect, broader than the Mercury version by just over a minute. The finale is sensitively paced and marks an interesting contrast with Isabelle Faust's much broader but metronomically accurate account (3/15), the difference between the two amounting to more than two minutes.

This is the stuff of real musical dialogue, a quality that also greets Vieuxtemps's Fourth Concerto. The devilish, rhythmically propulsive *Scherzo*, although not quite as fiery as Heifetz on his classic pre-war recording, is rather less cautious than the latest version with Hilary Hahn (DG, 4/15). Both here and in Ravel's *Tzigane*, Szeryng exhibits a bolder character than is sometimes the case with his commercial recordings. Nardini's lyrical E minor Concerto is a model of pre-Rococo elegance, Szeryng's tone supple and alluring.

All four performances are prime samplings of Szeryng's art but it's the Schumann Concerto that makes this CD more or less indispensable.

THE RECORDING



Schumann. Nardini. Ravel.
Vieuxtemps Vn Concs
Szeryng, Rosbaud
Hänssler Classic (M) CD94 229

Amadeus disc premieres

One of my fondest concert memories from the late 1960s is of hearing the **Amadeus Quartet** in recital at a north London school playing Bartók's Fourth Quartet, a work that on first acquaintance thrilled me to the core, though my first record of the work – a very different sort of performance – was by the original Fine Arts Quartet (Saga LP, Music & Arts CD). Sadly the Amadeus never recorded a Bartók cycle so the appearance in the fourth volume of Audite's collection of the quartet's 'RIAS recordings' of the Fourth and Sixth Quartets, both recorded a good decade before I saw that Hampstead performance, is particularly valuable.

The second CD opens with Mátyás Seiber's Third Quartet, *Quartetto lirico*, which is noticeably influenced by Bartók, the Sixth Quartet especially, and the Amadeus play it marvellously well. The opening minute or so of Bartók's Fourth sounds a little uncertain: the *pizzicato Scherzo* is rather measured and the wilcat finale lacks the sort of animal vigour that the Juilliards, the Véghe and indeed the Fine Arts brought to it. The

performance's highlight is Martin Lovett's passionately rhapsodic cello solo in the slow third movement. The Sixth's first movement is at times rhythmically ambiguous, as if the players were just a few short steps short of mastering its form, whereas they're nearer the target in the dry, even OTT humour that fills the two middle movements. Best by far is the closing *Mesto*, music filled with profound sadness, a sadness that the quartet members, or the three of them who had been exiled from Europe, will have felt as deeply as the composer himself. Ironically it's the all-British first disc that finds them truly in their element, the Second Quartets of Britten and Tippett, music they seem to connect with intuitively. Both performances are memorably expressive.

THE RECORDING



Bartók. Britten. Tippett, et al
Stg Qts
Amadeus Qt
Audite (B) (2) AUDITE21 429

Glorious Gottschalk

If the rigorous demands and tragic overtones of the Amadeus Quartet playing the music of their time darkens the skyline, then the Musical Concepts label is at hand with a zany three-CD programme of music by Louis Moreau Gottschalk (1829-69), a composer whose sun-drenched works anticipate later music by almost a century. Most remarkable is his 'first symphony', *A Night in the Tropics*, a dead ringer for Milhaud or Villa-Lobos though at times it sounds more like 'Bruckner meets Edmundo Ros'. Pianist Reid Nibley and the Utah Symphony Orchestra do the honours, whereas it falls to Eugene List to play the works for solo piano, most famously *The Banjo* and *Bamboula*, a dozen pieces in all, jammed full of character.

The second CD features *A Montevideo* and Hershy Kay's arrangement of the *Grand Tarantelle* for piano and orchestra (again with Nibley), and there are many other varied works programmed, including the 13-minute vocal *Escenas campestres* and *The Union* for two pianos. Good sound and useful notes help to make this a happy, diverting release.

THE RECORDING



Gottschalk Festival
Various artists
Musical Concepts (S) (3)
MC133

Books



Rob Cowan welcomes a new life-and-works treatment of Bartók:

'For many it will be the imagined presence of this physically frail but resolute human being that makes the most profound impression'



Pwyll ap Siôn reviews Philip Glass's new autobiography:

'Even Glass's part-time work as a plumber served a creative purpose when he introduced sculptor Richard Serra to lead'

Béla Bartók

By David Cooper

Yale University Press, HB, 436pp, £25

ISBN 978-0-300-14877-0



Like Bartók himself, David Cooper knows the value of pragmatic reserve. The enthusiast in him never

outshines the scholar. This absorbing study is historically informed, musically literate (individual works are analysed as and when they crop up in the course of the evolving biography), very readable and not infrequently moving. The analyses are exhaustive and quote specific note sequences, folk music derivations and so on, either by name or as notation. It would therefore be useful, though not mandatory, to have scores and/or recordings to hand while reading. That said, the beauty of Cooper's method is that if for the time being you don't feel like attending to the music, you can skip to the next phase in the story.

As reported, certain professional relationships prove fascinating and Bartók's own correspondence is often cited. For example, meeting Delius in Zurich was a particular pleasure. 'I am very much alone here apart from my one friend, Kodály,' wrote Bartók to Delius. 'I have nobody else to talk to, and I have never before met anyone to whom from the very first I could feel so close...'. Press notices and personal reminiscences are often revelatory. Although Cooper's coverage of Bartók's oeuvre is comprehensive, for many it will be the imagined presence of this physically frail but resolute human being that makes the most profound impression. Contradictions in his personality are striking. Unmaterialistic almost to a fault, he lived simply and was oblivious of anything remotely resembling prestige. Early on in the book Cooper alludes to what might have been autistic traits, or something similar, and in his Postlude cites a man who was, by some accounts, 'cold, remote, lacking

emotional intelligence, mathematical, detached, unfriendly, pedantic, caustic and humourless'. And yet others who managed to 'pierce his outer shell' found him warm, friendly, passionate, good-humoured, caring and engaged. Both sides of his personality rise to the fore throughout the narrative.

One recollection that focuses on Bartók as 'a very withdrawn, pure, naive, small-sized man, very timid and shy' concerns the Budapest premiere of the Second Piano Concerto under Otto Klemperer, who was enormous, 'six feet five or six', the one man dwarfing the other, at least in physical terms. An issue involving the then-new 'machine timpani' (pedal tims that facilitate a *glissando*), absent at the rehearsal, was pivotal. Klemperer walked out, while Bartók sat with his gloves on (it was cold and there was no heating) until a delegation coaxed Klemperer back to the hall. 'The concert was a great flop,' we're told: 'The Bartók Concerto had almost no applause.'

As it happens, negative responses are far from the norm. The modernist poet Ezra Pound was an especially perceptive commentator. Writing in the January 1937 edition of the journal *Music & Letters*, he observed: 'I find the [Fifth Quartet] whole, concrete, coherent. I think you could play it before or after or between any music you like and not damage it. It would hold its own and be different.' Amatory engagements were often intense, Stefi Geyer being a notable obsession during his early years. Folksong collecting expeditions are related as and when they occur, and the vicissitudes of political change that swept across Europe during Bartók's career are conveyed in detail.

Context is vital for a confident appreciation of his achievement and that's precisely what Cooper provides. The last years are particularly interesting, as is the history of unfinished works such as the Viola Concerto, which was left in a skeletal state although Bartók's description of it ('the orchestration will be transparent, more transparent than in a violin concerto') suggests that what we have isn't too far removed from what he intended; though,

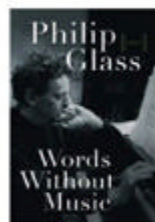
as Cooper says, it must remain a moot point whether he would have regarded any completion as an authentic part of his oeuvre. As to recordings, Cooper suggests, with some justification, that Bartók is best known as an interpreter of his own music, though we also have the evidence of his wider repertoire from his 1940 Washington DC recital with violinist Joseph Szigeti (which Cooper refers to), with music by Debussy and Beethoven, and, perhaps more important, radio recordings of piano duets by Brahms (F minor Quintet with his wife) and Liszt (*Concerto pathétique* with Dohnányi), plus various fragments that Hungaroton located and issued some years ago. And while a chapter on Bartók's own recordings might have proved useful, its absence is hardly of the essence. This excellent study will aid a fuller appreciation of both Bartók the man and one of the major musical forces of the 20th century. **Rob Cowan**

Words Without Music

By Philip Glass

Faber & Faber, HB, 432pp, £22.50

ISBN 978-0-571-32372-2



'If you're not a minimalist, what are you?' It's a question Philip Glass has been asked on a number

of occasions and his answer is always: 'I'm a theatre composer.' Of course, 'theatre composer' might usefully describe any number of composers, from Mozart to Sondheim, without necessarily telling us much about their musical style or the period to which they belong. But it does possess a particular resonance when applied to Glass and provides a clue to the title of this engaging and illuminating memoir.

It was through his work as a theatre composer that Glass discovered his voice and developed a musical language that could communicate it effectively. It also forced him to look at music from a different perspective. As he notes: 'The theatre...puts the



Philip Glass proves in his new book that nothing is ever wasted in the creation of a composer's individual musical voice

composer in an unexpected relationship to his work...unexpected things can take place.'

Glass's autobiography often moves beyond words and music to address people, personalities, opinions and beliefs. There are times when music itself takes something of a back seat. One is introduced to a diverse range of creative artists, visionaries, thinkers and spiritualists, and the significance of their work is outlined by Glass with passion and enthusiasm. This thirst for knowledge and understanding takes Glass from Tibetan Buddhism in the foothills of the Himalayas to the Wixárika Indians in central Mexico and to what he terms the 'four paths' of yoga, Buddhism, t'ai chi and the Toltec tradition.

How does music fit into all this? Well, in many ways. Such interconnected thinking allowed Glass to draw on his travels in India when composing the opera *Satyagraha* many years later, or to see how dubbing techniques in film, introduced to him in Paris during the mid-1960s, eventually proved useful when working on his opera *La Belle et la Bête*, which developed its own unique and original form of operatic 'dubbing'. Even Glass's part-time work as a plumber served a creative purpose when he introduced sculptor Richard Serra to lead, which then formed a central part of his 'splash pieces'.

One might describe Glass's approach as 'holistic', but he prefers to use the term 'immersive learning' – a principle whereby one gains true understanding through direct, experiential contact with a culture. Glass points out that, while we are bound to our own culture, it's nevertheless possible (one might even say essential) to step out of that world. That willingness to step out saw Glass entering the University of Chicago as a 15-year-old, then on to the Juilliard School in New York, from there to Paris, and finally back to New York in 1967 after a six-month trek across Central Asia to India. Glass states that 'transmission is the beginning of acquiring', and it is this ability to absorb such ideas and channel them in fresh directions that makes him such a unique figure.

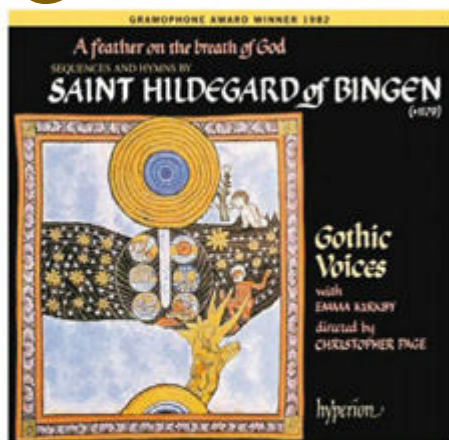
Glass engages more directly with musical concerns during the final two parts of the book, where he describes his early, 'grungy' minimalist style as akin to 'feeling the force of nature'. He also provides some illuminating thoughts on groundbreaking works such as *Music in Twelve Parts* and *Einstein on the Beach*, and covers in some detail his relationships with film directors such as Godfrey Reggio and Martin Scorsese.

Less revealing, perhaps, are his views on other composers' music. Unlike John

Adams, who is nothing if not direct in his opinions in this regard, Glass is never stronger than deferential here. Even Stockhausen and Boulez are mentioned in relatively glowing terms, all of which seems a far cry from comments made in an interview with Robert Ashley in 1976: 'I was living in a wasteland dominated by these maniacs, these complete creeps, you know – who were trying to make everyone write this crazy, creepy music.'

One imagines that, had this memoir been written 20 years ago, the narrative emphasis would have been different. The so-called Minimalists are hardly mentioned, which is a shame, since here was an opportunity for Glass to set the record straight vis-à-vis his work with Reich during the late 1960s. On the other hand, Glass's teacher Nadia Boulanger emerges as one of the most remarkable people he ever met; he even goes so far as to state that 'I have not written a note of music that wasn't influenced by her'. Theatre, or indeed words, may not have featured prominently in Boulanger's counterpoint classes, which at the end of the book maybe takes Glass full circle. Music is ultimately about music, as he concludes: 'The music is the thought...the modality in which the brain is operating is music.' **Pwyll ap Siôn**

Classics RECONSIDERED



David Fallows and
Ivan Moody reappraise
Hyperion's hit 1981 recording
of Hildegard of Bingen's
'A feather on the
breath of God'



'A feather on the breath of God'

Emma Kirkby *sop* **Gothic Voices** /
Christopher Page

Hyperion ® CDA66039 (44' · DDD)

(Recorded in St Jude-on-the-Hill, Hampstead
Garden Suburb, London in September 1981)

This remarkable record contains a collection of choice gems from the works of one of the 'greatest creative personalities of the Middle Ages', Abbess Hildegard of Bingen: sequences and hymns in honour of the Holy Spirit, the Virgin Mary, and a number of local saints, the object of the

composer's special devotion. Admittedly, we have limited means of assessing how and in what circumstances these inspired pieces were actually performed during the lifetime of Hildegard herself. But the refreshingly unsophisticated timbre of the four sopranos and the reedy, almost boyish, vocal quality of the contralto are convincing enough to transport the listener in his imagination right back into the unpolluted atmosphere of Hildegard's cloister.

Most to be savoured, to my mind, are the unaccompanied items, amounting to 50 per cent of the total. Indeed, since the sleeve-notes go out of their way to tell us

that 'distractions such as the intrusion of instrumental decorations' were to be avoided, why did the producer go out of his way to introduce symphony and reed drones in the performance of the other 50 per cent? (I suspect Reznikoff's influence, consciously or unconsciously, to have been partly responsible for this.) As for 'extrovert vocal practices', one curious little vocal turn did, in fact, occasionally make its discreet presence felt. But overall this is a delightful recording and a welcome addition to the growing repertoire of medieval music available on disc. Warmly recommended.

Mary Berry July 1982

David Fallows Nobody would have guessed from Mary Berry's warm but fundamentally unsurprised review that this would become the absolute bestseller in the entire Hyperion catalogue: 30 years after it was first issued, it still features among Hyperion's top-selling discs. Perhaps the reason is that Mary, who was an Augustinian canoness (when I first knew her, she was Mother Thomas More), knew Hildegard's music better than most of us and perhaps failed to register the true novelty of a disc devoted entirely to Hildegard. For my part, I knew of Hildegard only from the discussion of *Columba aspexit* in Peter Dronke's marvellous book on *The Medieval Lyric* (Boydell and Brewer: 1968) for which Ian Bent had contributed a new transcription of the music. So I had used that piece quite a lot in my teaching in the intervening years; but it was much later that I discovered how much glorious music by Hildegard survives.

Ivan Moody Yes, in retrospect it is very surprising that Mary did not make more of the huge originality of the recording, which was a typically imaginative leap of faith on

the part of Hyperion's Ted Perry. I also only knew of Hildegard from Dronke's book, so this was a real bombshell. It was constantly being talked about, and I remember people desperate to track down Christopher Page's transcriptions of the music in order to perform them. As a composer, I was fascinated by Hildegard's astounding melodic gifts. They impressed John Tavener too: I remember him saying once that he thought Hildegard perhaps the greatest Western composer!

DF I suppose one of the difficulties with Hildegard has always been that people find it hard to get her in focus. For every listener who thinks she's perhaps the greatest Western composer, there are several others who think she was a slightly mindless nun who wrote more or less the same melody dozens of times over; for every reader who thinks her poetry is truly resourceful and inspired, there are others who think she simply plastered together streams of perfumed words. Over the intervening years I have listened to all of her music many times over, and it seems to me that part of her genius is the way she

uses a relatively restricted melodic vocabulary with astonishing resource. I also keep hoping to find a medieval melodist who is quite as interesting. You say you 'were' fascinated. Is that still how you feel?

IM It is indeed. Working as I do within Eastern Orthodox traditions (both as composer and priest), I find an enormous resonance in her work. You put your finger on it when you say that Hildegard 'uses a relatively restricted melodic vocabulary with astonishing resource' – there is surely no better definition of the way any liturgical chant should work, from whatever tradition, and it's certainly a description I would use of many composers of Byzantine chant, for example. Hildegard's melodies stay in the mind – I can walk around for days humming fragments of *Columba aspexit* or *O viridissima virga*. I must say that I have not been particularly conscious of a negative view of her.

DF That raises two more questions, if I may, before we get down to this particular recording. First, whether I understand you correctly as saying that her kind of melodic



Emma Kirkby appears on the album in 'Columba aspexit' and 'O Jerusalem'

style is more characteristic of Byzantine chant than of Western chant? Second – because we can't pretend the question isn't there and we need to have clear views – how far you think her present fame is because she was a woman? (And my own answer to the second is that she merits that fame irrespective of whether she was a woman, though you could argue that many details of her distinctive style arise because she *was* a woman.)

IM No, no, I don't mean the melodic style itself but the – how to describe it? – the huge melodic *arch*. She uses her 'relatively restricted melodic vocabulary', to return to your original phrase, with a deep and virtuoso understanding of its possibilities, which seems to me as characteristic of West and East. As to the second point, I certainly think that some of her present fame is due to the question of gender, and it probably *has* played a significant role –

it is not for nothing that Fiona Maddocks's book on her is subtitled *The Woman of Her Age* – but she could as well be celebrated for her role in early medicine. All I can say is that when I heard this recording for the first time, I was stunned by the music (and the poetry) and did not particularly reflect on the fact that they were written by a woman, though of course that fact assumed more importance the more I read.

DF Precisely my feelings. But let's come to the recording. This was the first record Christopher Page did for Hyperion. So far as I can see, in the next 25 records with them he only once returned to early monophony and he never used any of the same musicians again, apart from Margaret Philpot, who here sings two pieces alone. Philpot was already well known for her singing with Musica Reservata over the previous 10 years, though her career really took off over the next years with her singing

mainly for Page and Gothic Voices. Emma Kirkby was also already well known, mainly for her singing with The Consort of Musicke and the Academy of Ancient Music, though I think this is the only time she has recorded anything earlier than the 15th century. Andrew Parrott was already well known as a conductor, though is to this day otherwise almost unknown as a singer (more's the pity). That is to say that it was a one-off, albeit with carefully selected singers. What gave it its special power?

IM A one-off indeed. I remember expecting more of the same sort of repertoire from Gothic Voices and being quite surprised both by the fact that it didn't happen and by the changes in personnel. I'd like to say that its special power came from Hildegard's compositional voice, but there were certainly other factors. The purity of Emma Kirkby's voice, of course, which strikes you from the first note. And, oddly enough, I think the use of the 'symphony', the hurdy-gurdy, for the drones was significant. The use of an *ison* is nothing new to anyone interested in Eastern chant, of course, but Marcel Pérès was still only beginning his work in that direction at that time, and so it was new and powerful. I wonder, too, whether listeners who liked, say Vangelis or Mike Oldfield, might not have found the actual sound of it seductive. What do you think about this?

DF Mary Berry actually surmised the influence of Igor Reznikoff, who had done quite a few recordings of chant with drone basis. I suspect that the sound world was fairly common at the time; and I find the sound of this record as seductive today as I did 30 years ago. On the other hand, there have been dozens on dozens of later Hildegard recordings, many of them relying far more heavily on a New Age approach. My guess is that the success of this one lies elsewhere, particularly the singing of Emma Kirkby (who is on only two tracks), Margaret Philpot, Andrew Parrott and Emily van Evera. It is also down to the sheer concentration and coherence of Christopher Page's vision of the music, unfussy (despite the drones, which are in only half of the pieces and even then very restrained), direct, language-based, always moving forward.

IM Yes, I'd agree with that, though I am not convinced by the Reznikoff hypothesis. And certainly Christopher Page allowed the music to speak for itself, through his carefully selected group of singers and his constant, close attention to the text; it really has lost none of its power. **G**

THE SPECIALIST'S GUIDE TO...

Player and instrument partnerships

There are many partnerships of renown between players and instruments but, as string instrument specialist **Caroline Gill** discovers in her choice of 10 favourite recordings, there's often more to it than just the pairing itself

Great partnerships between players and their instruments have, throughout history, created stories as engaging and varied as great love affairs. David Oistrakh and the 'Marsick' Stradivari violin (now played by James Ehnes); Peter Schidlöf and the 'Macdonald' Stradivari viola (which, when it came to be offered for sale, had a \$45million price tag hanging from it); and Richard Tognetti and the 'Carrodus' violin by 'del Gesù' are but a few player-and-instrument partnerships that invite further investigation just by virtue of their pairings.

But there are recordings that go even further: those with fascinating backstories to the relationships between the music (as

well as the instrument) and the musicians involved. So when making a decision about a piece of music – that is to say, coming to a conclusion about what it means to the individual listener – context is everything. As much as it is important to consider the perfection of the technique on any given recording when deciding, there is more to peeling back the layers of a great work than just choosing from the shelf the most technically accomplished version.

Everyone has their own subconscious criteria for a recording that is most likely to interest them – listening to an outwardly painful performance that nevertheless epitomises engaging and insightful musical thought may be one, in the same way that

an exotic backstory to the instrument (or instruments) involved may be another. If the composer had not had access to that instrument, would they have written something different? Or if the musician or musicians performing the work had had different tools with which to work, would they have thought through a completely different approach?

The instruments and recordings listed here are snapshots of history that illustrate how certain pieces of music stroll into the subconscious with an extra dimension of significance which allows them to be truly enduring, through the hands of the musicians that knew and understood them. **G**



The Tokyo Quartet, here playing the 'Paganini' suite of Stradivari instruments which feature on their recording of Beethoven's 'Late' String Quartets on Harmonia Mundi

PHOTOGRAPHY: PETER CHECCHIA

**Elgar: Violin Concerto**

Nikolaj Znaider
'Kreisler' 'del Gesù' violin
RCA (M) 88697 60588-2 (5/10)
Znaider recorded Elgar's

Violin Concerto with Sir Colin Davis and the Staatskapelle Dresden at the start of 2010, the year he toured the piece to celebrate the 100th anniversary of its premiere. Znaider plays the 'Kreisler' 'del Gesù' violin on which Fritz Kreisler himself premiered the concerto in London in 1910. Plans at the time for HMV to record the concerto with Elgar conducting Kreisler fell through, so a direct comparison is tantalisingly impossible.

**Bruch: Violin Concerto**

Yehudi Menuhin
'Khevenhüller' bow
Naxos mono (S)
8 110902 (A/99)

This is the first concerto recording made by Menuhin, in 1931. He is playing his 'Prince Khevenhüller' Stradivari, which was purchased for him when he was 12 years old. The recording is made even more interesting by the fact that Menuhin had recently received the matching 'Khevenhüller' violin bow as a gift from influential dealer Emil Herrmann. There is a strong sense in this recording of the promise of the future.

**Bach: Art of Fugue**

Emerson Quartet
Suite of Samuel Zygmuntowicz
instruments
Deutsche Grammophon

(M) 477 7458 (8/08)

Apart from the slightly anarchic presence of a beautiful 1796 Mantegazza viola, the Emersons recorded this extraordinary work in 2008 on a suite of modern instruments by the eminent American violin maker Samuel Zygmuntowicz. The clarity and cleanliness of the instruments' tone in this performance mean that there are very clear solutions to the mathematical problems presented in the fugues.

**Beethoven: Late String Quartets**

Tokyo Quartet
'Paganini' quartet of
Stradivari instruments

Harmonia Mundi (M) (S) HMU80 7481/3 (11/10)
This is the pinnacle of the Tokyo Quartet's artistic achievement, played on the unique 'Paganini' suite of Stradivari instruments (including the late and rare 'Mendelssohn' viola). The homogeneity of this collection enhances the consensus of thought and congruence of sound. The instruments all belonged to Paganini, and were additionally modified by another great maker, Sacconi, in the 20th century.

**Bach: Cello Suites, BWV 1007-1012**

Anner Bylsma
'Servais' Stradivari cello
Sony Classical (S) (2)

COLS2K48047 (1/93)

Much is made of the violoncello piccolo that Bylsma uses for the Sixth Suite, often to the neglect of the very large 'Servais' Stradivari he used for the other five. Adrien François Servais was a thoroughly modern cellist of the 19th century, and as Bylsma's roots are also in modern technique, to hear him playing such an unwieldy instrument to such extraordinarily precise effect is particularly exciting.

**Mozart: Sinfonia concertante, K364**

Yuri Bashmet
Testore viola of 1758
Olympia (F) MKM109

Yuri Bashmet famously plays a viola made in 1758 by the Milanese luthier Paolo Antonio Testore. Testore violins are highly prized, but it is the lower-pitched instruments that are particularly resonant. Mozart also owned a Testore viola (that he commissioned directly from the maker), which he similarly chose for its warmth of tone, as he very much liked to play in the middle of the texture.

**Delius and Ireland, arr Tertis: Viola Sonatas**

Roger Chase
Tertis's Montagnana viola
Dutton Epoch (F)

CDLX7250 (11/10)

The story of the Montagnana viola now played by Roger Chase is a complicated one, but it starts in Paris in 1920. The celebrated viola player Lionel Tertis found it in pieces, and painstakingly reconstructed it into the rare glory it is today. This recording not only uses the Tertis Montagnana, but also employs Tertis's own arrangements of these works, reflecting his lifelong relationship with this instrument.

**Brahms: Three Violin Sonatas**

Josef Suk
'Joachim-Elman' Stradivari
Supraphon (B) (S) SU40752

Josef Suk owned a number of the 'great' Stradivari violins, but the violin on which he did much of his performing was the 1722 Joachim-Elman. Joseph Joachim was a close friend not only of Suk's grandfather (also called Josef) but also of Brahms, with whom he enjoyed a tempestuous love-hate relationship. Since Suk's death in 2011, the Joachim-Elman has been on display in the Chimei Museum in Taiwan, so is sadly not being played.

**Schubert: Arpeggione Sonata**

Mstislav Rostropovich
Storioni cello

Decca (F) 460 9742 (10/70^R)

Rostropovich was famed for his ostentatious Stradivari cellos, but he also had an abiding love of the work of Lorenzo Storioni, a lesser-known maker working a full generation later. As in the case of the Testore family's instruments, the tonal qualities of Storioni's instruments work better at lower pitches. Although the sound is fulsome, it's still intimate and warm in a way that underpins the symbiotic performances (such as this one) Rostropovich made with Britten at the piano.

**Britten: String Quartets Nos 2 and 3**

Brodsky Quartet / Britten's Giussani viola
Challenge Classics (M) (D) CC72099 (6/03)

The members of the Brodsky Quartet have had access to some extraordinary instruments over the course of their career, but the viola player Paul Cassidy has had a particularly good run of some wonderful examples. Most notably he plays a Francesco Giussani viola of 1843 which was a gift to Britten from Frank Bridge before he left for America, accompanied by a note:

'So that a bit of us accompanies you on your adventure. We are all "revelations" as you know. Just go on expanding.' Britten had been Bridge's only composition pupil, and they never met again. It is also said that Britten himself recorded the Second Quartet (with that beautiful open C string in the middle of the mighty final 'Chacony') on the same viola.

THE GRAMOPHONE COLLECTION

Rachmaninov's *Études-tableaux*, Op 39

The essence of these piano pieces is, as **Bryce Morrison** finds, best captured by the Russian piano elite

The transition in critical estimates of Rachmaninov from 'salon' (or, worse still, 'popular') to 'serious' has been slow. Today, the 1927 edition of *Grove* claiming that he is 'too cosmopolitan in idiom to be of lasting significance' is laughed to scorn (with Ashkenazy prominent among the merry-makers). From the same period: 'The beauty of his music is overwhelming... only a Puritan could fail to respond to it' (*The Record Guide*, 1955, edited by Edward Sackville-West and Desmond Shawe-Taylor); while for Boris Berezovsky, stung by what he sees as musical snobbery, 'Rachmaninov is a Russian Bach, his music alive with contrapuntal magic and complexity.' Point counterpoint! The sticking, and now tipping, point surely lies in Rachmaninov's unapologetic emotionalism, a quality dear to the Russian soul but one viewed with suspicion and even distaste by a more academic and circumspect mentality.

Rachmaninov is now no longer exclusive to Russia but is performed by pianists of virtually every nationality – even the French have erased their once snobbish disdain (for Nadia Boulanger, chocolate was preferable to a composer she found 'très vulgaire'). Yet if Rachmaninov's Romantic rhetoric and deep-dyed melancholy are central to Russia, it must be said that even Sviatoslav Richter, Rachmaninov pianist par excellence, shied away from the emotional storms of Op 39 No 5, declaring, 'Although I love listening to it I try to avoid playing such music as it makes me feel completely naked emotionally. But if you decide to perform it, be good enough to undress.'

If proof of Rachmaninov's stature were needed it would surely be provided by the *Études-tableaux*, Op 39, his second book of studies and a notable advance in richness and complexity on the earlier but very attractive Op 33 set. Completed in 1917, the year of the Russian Revolution and the time of the composer's enforced exile, they mirror a dark and clouded ecstasy only resolved in a defiant major-key conclusion. The title *Études-tableaux* invites reduction. Mendelssohn thought music too precise rather than too vague for language, and to talk of 'waves' (No 1) or 'seagulls' (No 2), let alone Rachmaninov's own description of No 7 as a funeral occupied by 'fine incident and hopeless rain', limits rather than expands Op 39's stature.

Ferocious and tormenting in its demands, Op 39 is designed for those whose outsize technical command is complemented by a born feel for turbulence and upheaval. Milk and water as opposed to Russian vodka play into the hands of those few who dismiss qualities alien to their own restricted natures. And here the question of nationalism once again rears its head. There are, of course, some notable exceptions, and yet can it be coincidental that the greatest Rachmaninov pianists are Russian? If pride of place went to four Spanish pianists in my *Gramophone* Collection on Albéniz's *Iberia*, a similar situation obtains in the case of Rachmaninov's Op 39.

FULL SETS THAT CRY OUT FOR MORE...

And now to complete cycles, commencing with lesser mortals. As Rubinstein once

remarked, there's a wide gulf between 'first-raters' and 'others', as he suitably placed himself, Horowitz, Michelangeli, Richter, Gilels, Arrau et al in the first group.

Let's begin with the indefatigable **Idil Biret** (whose discography even includes Brahms's *51 Exercises*), who shows herself indifferent to much beyond surface fluency in No 1; and why so fast in No 2 (admittedly a common failing) when it is marked *lento*? Inclined to go her own way rather than Rachmaninov's, her skittish facility is an undernourished alternative to grandeur. **John Lill** (joint first-prize winner in the 1970 International Tchaikovsky Competition) offers a weightier experience – indeed, is solid as the proverbial rock. But it would be hard to find a more studio-bound performance, one that fails to read above, between and below the lines. To evoke Muriel Spark's iconic Jean Brodie: 'Safety does not come first. Goodness, Truth, and Beauty come first.' Again, if you are looking for a higher degree of voltage or edge you will hardly find it from **Artur Pizarro** in the first volume of his projected cycle of the complete solo works. Tempos are moderate, the emotional temperature low, and if Poulenc, stung by an overly dry way with his music, declared, 'Put more butter in the sauce,' I can only imagine a pianist of true Russian vintage, on hearing Pizarro, begging for more pep and a higher degree of intensity. For Pizarro, greater ferocity would be abrasive, yet these performances are for those who, perversely, enjoy a soothing, nightcap view



'Too cosmopolitan to be of lasting significance'? The Op 39 pieces are proof of Rachmaninov's stature

of Rachmaninov. Writing of **Martin Cousin**, an American critic exclaimed, 'This guy's the Real Deal!' But again there is too little on offer in his Rachmaninov beyond a civilised veneer. **Hanna Shybayeva**, too, takes a somnolent view. And although she is admirable in the painful, limping progress of No 2 (music that surely reaches its apogee in Debussy's prelude *Des pas sur la neige*), she is the reverse of extrovert in Nos 4-7. Per contra, **Barry Snyder** relishes storms and stresses, but his lack of willingness to explore the lower reaches

of the dynamic spectrum make for an experience more blistering than musical.

STEPPING CLOSER TO THE MARK

With **Jean Philippe-Collard** you listen to another level of achievement – a big-handed reaction to traditional French pianism (to what he scathingly calls Marguerite Long's 'diggy-diggy-dee' school of playing). He takes No 6 by the throat (Pizarro has the wolf and Red Riding Hood on the best of terms), and there is a sense, too, in No 7 of music

almost too dark for utterance. With **John Ogdon** you feel only an intermittent engagement with his task. Recorded under more than trying conditions, he was already on the cusp of a mental breakdown. True, in No 5 he fires up, thus making a nonsense of the popular 'gentle giant' myth associated with him; but the climax of No 2 is thrown away, No 6 starts with a disturbing error (something that in the general confusion slipped the producer's notice), and if he is again gripping in parts of No 7 the overall impression is of



'Daunting authority': Vladimir Ashkenazy's muscle-rippling performance of Rachmaninov's Op 39 commands attention at every point

a pianist no longer in command of his situation. Ogdon played and recorded too much, and too many of these performances hardly withstand close scrutiny, their air of disillusion a far cry from his early brilliance. **Freddy Kempf** offers a less charged experience, but his immense facility finds him moving effortlessly from inwardness to an explosive energy. A major talent whose musical grace and fluency in No 2 rises to a truly savage anger, he makes the storm clouds scud across a desolating landscape. There's no lack of ardour from **Howard Shelley** who is musicianly to the core even if – like Valerie Tryon in her early black disc (the first LP of Op 39) – he sees Rachmaninov at his most dramatic as in need of a cooling

agent. **Nicholas Angelich**, whose recording I underestimated at an earlier stage, may be more plaintive than savage in No 5 but he is graceful and winning in the initially gentle undulations of No 8 and, for once, truly *lento* in No 2. **Yuri Paterson-Olenich**'s playing brims over with ideas, a testament to his ardour and dedication. His Russian, rather than his English, temperament (he is Anglo-Russian) is to the fore even when his fast-flowing tempo for No 2 finds him shying away from its pain. Less virtuosic than others, his musical instincts rarely fail him. **Vladimir Ovchinnikov** also lacks voltage, but is never less than interesting, is musing and poetic in No 2 but unable to generate sufficient tension in the madcap chase of No 6. Finally in this group,

Rustem Hayroudinoff (a 'benchmark recording' for one of my colleagues) is adept at locating a dark undertow in the work of a composer who once confessed, 'Sometimes I think someone will come down the chimney and murder me'. Here is all the rise and fall of a cruel sea in No 1, a cool but always expressive way with No 2. Disappointingly relaxed in No 9's major-key triumph, he is personal and eloquent in minor-key abyss.

INCOMPLETE - BUT NOT INSIGNIFICANT

By way of intermission, I should say that no admirer of the Rachmaninov *Etudes-tableaux* could do without passing mention of several incomplete versions. No pianist has ever equalled, let alone excelled,

FORMIDABLE CHOICE

Vladimir Ashkenazy

Decca London © 455 234-2LC6

Formidably in command of even the most daunting technical challenge



and remembering his Russian roots throughout, Ashkenazy can be more intimidating than affectionate in Op 39. But his authority is never in doubt.

YOUNG-STAR CHOICE

Alexander Gavrylyuk VAI © DVDVAI4433

The charismatic Gavrylyuk, possessor of



immense technical resource, makes Rachmaninov the centre of this wide-ranging recital. With infectious brio and insight, he rises to the challenge of fluently communicating emotion to his audience.

POLYMATHIC CHOICE

Alexander Melnikov

Harmonia Mundi © HMC901978

Melnikov's interest in historic as well as modern performance traditions and his participation



in duos and chamber-music ensembles give his Rachmaninov an added richness, colour and drama. And his playing is as masterly as it is concentrated.

Sviatoslav Richter in Rachmaninov, and in his live performance of Op 39 Nos 1, 2, 3, 4, 7 and 9 he makes you recall King Lear's defiance ('Blow, winds, and crack your cheeks!'). Then there is **Vladimir Horowitz**, who once told me he could play like an angel. His teasing indulgence and theatricality in Nos 7 and 9 may be enthralling but it is hardly angelic. Early in his career the young **Evgeny Kissin** put pianists twice his age in the shade in Nos 1, 2, 4, 5, 6 and 9, and the Russians themselves would cry out were I not to mention **Van Cliburn** in No 5. For Russians, Cliburn, at the start of his career, was 'one of us'.

TRUE GREATS IN COMPLETE SETS

And so finally to the truest kings and princes of Russian pianistic glory in a complete Op 39 (no queens or princesses on this occasion). **Vladimir Ashkenazy's** recording (part of his complete cycle of concertos, the *Paganini* Rhapsody and the solo piano music) is of a daunting authority, positively commanding your attention at every point. Muscles bulge and ripple in a manner remote from his early, relatively lightweight playing, which he later came to consider superficial. 'Do you like pianists who fidget their fingers over the keys?' he asked me after a masterclass given to some luckless American students. I cannot resist adding that I was part of this occasion, having been invited to play the first two of the Op 39 études. Mercifully, Ashkenazy's intimidating scrutiny took so long and was so pronounced that time ran out and I never played for him; otherwise I am not sure I would be here to tell the tale! In common with many Russian musicians, Ashkenazy's personal charm does not extend to piano playing lacking in total technical authority and musical conviction. But, answering his own rhetorical question, his Op 39 études are of an intimidating strength and proficiency. He packs a formidable punch in No 1 (more so than in his earlier recording), his trenchancy emphasised by Decca's glittering or clangorous (according to taste) sound. He rises to great heights of declamation in No 2, making you realise that despite the denigration of his early years, when all forms of intellectual enquiry were crushed, he remains true to his Russian roots. Scriabin and Rachmaninov in particular have remained central to his vast repertoire. Vilified in his native land, his name was later removed from all official records. He literally became a non-person. I make this point because, as his playing declares, music survives above and beyond such dire conditions. Even when you find him more gusty than measured or relentless



'Emotional commitment': Gavrylyuk approaches Op 39 as an endlessly evolving journey

in the climax of No 7 with its earlier *lamentoso* outcries and hints of the Russian liturgy, you can only wonder at his visceral attack in No 5 and his dazzling *scherzando* finish to No 8. Ashkenazy, despite his worldwide, cosmopolitan career, remains gloriously true to the Russian idiom.

And then there is **Alexander Gavrylyuk**, who was 22 when he was recorded in Miami, and already possessed with the trenchancy and emotional commitment of the great Russian pianists. He is an international prizewinner who (unlike

many who fail to survive their early success) has continued to cause a furore, performing with the most celebrated orchestras and conductors, including Ashkenazy, with whom he recorded the complete Rachmaninov concertos and *Paganini* Rhapsody. After a brief sojourn in Australia he returned to his native Ukraine, and although his repertoire is wide-ranging, his focus on the Romantics (plus Bach and Mozart), and Russian Romantics in particular, tells its own tale. His greatest success, as on this recording, has been in

SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

DATE / ARTISTS	RECORD COMPANY (REVIEW DATE)
1945/75 Horowitz (excs)	RCA Ⓢ (70 discs) 88697 57500-2
1970 Van Cliburn (excs)	RCA Ⓢ (28 discs) 88765 40723-2
1971 Collard*	EMI Ⓢ Ⓢ 586134-2; Ⓢ Ⓢ 648345-2
1971 Ogdon*	EMI Ⓢ 17 704637-2; Testament Ⓢ SBT1295
1983 Shelley	Hyperion Ⓢ CDH55403 (8/88*)
1984 Richter (excs)	Praga Ⓢ DSD350 083
1985 Ovchinnikov*	EMI Ⓢ 232282-2; Olympia Ⓢ MKM145
1985/86 Ashkenazy* Decca London Ⓢ Ⓢ 455 234-2LC6; Decca Ⓢ 11 478 6348DC11; Ⓢ (32 discs) 478 6765DB32	
1988 Kissin (excs)	RCA Ⓢ RCA RD87982; Sony Ⓢ 2 88697 30110-2 (3/89)
1989 Biret*	Naxos Ⓢ 8 550347
1992 Lugansky*	Challenge Classics Ⓢ CC72057 (1/95*)
1994 Angelich*	Harmonia Mundi Ⓢ HMA195 1547
1995 Lill*	Nimbus Ⓢ NI5439; Ⓢ 3 NI1786; Ⓢ 4 NI1736
1996 Snyder	Bridge Ⓢ BRIDGE9347
1999 Kempf	BIS Ⓢ BIS-CD1042
2006 Hayroudinoff*	Chandos Ⓢ CHAN10391 (2/07)
2007 Gavrylyuk	VAI Ⓢ DVD DVDVA14433
2007 Paterson-Olenich	Prometheus Editions Ⓢ EDITION007 (9/09)
2008 Melnikov	Harmonia Mundi Ⓢ HMC901978 (4/08)
2012 Cousin*	Somm Ⓢ SOMM0136
2012 Shybayeva*	Etcetera Ⓢ 5 KTCl450
2013 Pizarro	Odradek Ⓢ 2 ODRCD315 (1/15)

*coupled with Etudes-tableaux, Op 33

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'Audacious': Nikolai Lugansky's interpretation reveals him as 'willing to step outside convention and declaim Rachmaninov's glory to the heavens'

Rachmaninov, and here he makes Op 39 the centerpiece of his programme. In No 1 his relatively slow tempo uncovers a sinister undertow beneath the hyperactive surface, finding time to inflect even the busiest pages with freedom, colour and imagination. What intensity, too, in every agonised page of No 2, where he plays as if his life depends on every note. He is gnomic, even playful – a view that's fascinatingly different from Nikolai Lugansky's wintry drive and severity in the dancing measures of No 4. In extreme contrast Gavrylyuk is explosively intense in No 5, and tells you also that No 8 is a place of bittersweet dreaming. Time and again he returns you to a period when Russian-trained pianists (and not only pianists) were dedicated exclusively to their art – to an endlessly evolving and developing journey (for Ashkenazy, a spiritual quest). Difficult, too, not to add that such manifest devotion must have prompted members of his wildly applauding American audience to wonder why a country with relatively limitless funds and facilities has created so few pianists of true international calibre in the past few decades. Virtually every pianist of note, whether male or female, comes from elsewhere.


Alexander Melnikov shows himself to be a pianistic wizard, though one who never plays for effect or according to an external criterion (unlike Horowitz). For all his formidable mastery he never uses Rachmaninov as a springboard for excess. Greatly admired by Richter during his

early career, he is a vitally enterprising pianist delighting in historic as well as modern performance. His collaboration with Andreas Staier and Alexei Lubimov, his recordings of Beethoven's complete violin and cello sonatas and his desire to invite comparison between the preludes and fugues of Bach and Shostakovich perhaps give a clue as to the sheer quality of his Op 39 études. His storming journey through No 1 sets even the most sanguine listener's blood racing, and here his command is so engulfing that he can allow himself a heart-stopping freedom and imaginative scope. What grandeur, too, in No 5, alive in his hands with a brooding and explosive menace. Intriguingly, and unlike Ashkenazy and Gavrylyuk, he finds a Mephistophelian glint in the outwardly playful measures that end No 8.

CROWNING GLORY

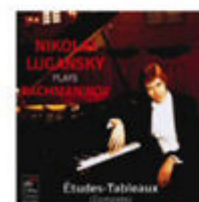
And yet, if I was to name the most trailblazing and meteoric performer of all it would have to be **Nikolai Lugansky**. A pianist who has sometimes shrouded his mastery in detachment, he is here at his most audacious, willing to step outside convention and declaim Rachmaninov's glory to the heavens. There is nothing reserved in what is surely the most freely expressive, personal and, at the climax, seething performance on record of No 2. No 3 is of a shot-from-guns virtuosity that makes you cry out like Miranda in *The Tempest*: 'If by your art, my dearest

father, you have put the wild waters in this roar, allay them.' There is nothing of a temporarily lighthearted oasis in No 4. Here, unlike Ashkenazy and Gavrylyuk, he is far from amiable, making you hear in his pace and urgency 'time's winged chariot hurrying near'. Again, there is to be no sentimental indulgence or malingering in No 8 but an impetus and momentum that would surely have caught the composer's admiration. Rachmaninov himself was, after all, the least sentimental pianist in his own music.

Lugansky's teacher and mentor Tatiana Nikolayeva declared her pupil 'the next one'. She may well have been right, particularly when you hear playing of such an authentic, all-Russian vintage. Lugansky, and to an only slightly lesser extent Melnikov, are pianists who could surely exclaim, as did Claudio Arrau before them, 'When I play I am in ecstasy; that is what I live for.' 

TRAILBLAZING CHOICE

Nikolai Lugansky Challenge Classics © CC72057 In his Op 39 Lugansky trumps all aces with playing far remote from his occasional detachment. Indeed, his performance blazes



with a demonic force, purging all possible sentimentality while telling you in every bar of Rachmaninov's uniquely Russian flavour and stature.

PLAYLISTS

Explore music via our themed listening suggestions

Pianist and former Rubinstein pupil, Janina Fialkowska celebrates a Golden Age of Chopin playing. *Gramophone* reviewer William Yeoman listens to the music of his homeland, Australia, and *Gramophone*'s Editor-in-Chief, James Jolly gathers music that explores the magical world of sleep and dreams.

Forty winks

James Jolly on music that explores the world of sleep and dreams

Sleep and dreams – such unifying and universal concepts, yet so indefinable – have long fascinated artists, and musicians, who are used to working in the abstract, have always been drawn to this strange world. Handel's aria 'Gentle Morpheus', sung by Calliope in the incidental music for *Alceste* is one of the most ravishing invitations to sleep. Shakespeare, another great creator fascinated with the world of sleep and dreams, inspired two very different musical responses: Verdi's intense Sleepwalking scene from *Macbeth* and Britten's charming, innocent chorus 'On the ground, sleep sound' from the sleep-infused *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. The moments before sleep are explored by Debussy as his tired little faun struggles in the heat of the afternoon and Rebecca Clarke's miniature for viola and piano also tangles with Morpheus's powerful magic. A divine sleep comes courtesy of Olivier Messiaen's sensual *Turangalila-Symphonie* (with its echoes of *Tristan und Isolde*) and in Jules Massenet's oratorio *La Vierge* of which the 'Last Sleep of the Virgin' is the once-popular encore number. In Humperdinck's opera *Hänsel und Gretel* say their prayers before slipping into sleep, and Humperdinck's great influence Richard Wagner explores much more hot-house, enveloping 'Dreams' in his *Wesendonck Lieder*, a far cry from Schumann's charmingly direct 'Träume' movement from the suite *Kinderszenen*.

- **Handel *Alceste* - Gentle Morpheus**
Emma Kirkby; AAM / Christopher Hogwood
Decca
- **Verdi *Macbeth* - Sleepwalking scene**
Shirley Verrett; La Scala / Claudio Abbado
DG



Titania Sleeping by the English Victorian painter Richard Dadd

- **Britten *A Midsummer Night's Dream* - In the ground, sleep sound**
Choirs; LSO / Benjamin Britten
Decca
- **Debussy *Prélude à L'après-midi d'un faune*** BPO / Herbert von Karajan
DG
- **Clarke *Morpheus***
Philip Dukes; Sophia Rahman
Naxos
- **Messiaen *Turangalila-Symphonie* - Jardin du sommeil d'amour**
Finnish RSO / Hannu Lintu
Ondine
- **Massenet *La Vierge* - Last Sleep of the Virgin** Monte-Carlo Opera Orch / John Eliot Gardiner
Erato
- **Humperdinck *Hänsel und Gretel* - Evening Prayer**
Elisabeth Schwarzkopf; Elisabeth Grümmer; Philharmonia / Herbert von Karajan
Warner Classics
- **Wagner *Wesendonck Lieder* - Träume**
Christa Ludwig; Philharmonia / Otto Klemperer
Warner Classics
- **Schumann *Kinderszenen* - Träumerei**
Radu Lupu
Decca

Australian music

William Yeoman suggests works by Australian composers

In the 21st century it doesn't always make sense to talk about a typically 'Australian' classical music, and the works I've included here should give you a fair idea of the range and diversity of my own country's classical music – as well as its colour, evocativeness and playfulness.

Peter Sculthorpe's portrait of Australia's Kakadu National Park *Kakadu* is rich in seething onomatopoeia and sublime orchestral masses. By contrast, David Lumsdaine's piano miniatures *Six Postcard Pieces* evoke the 'resonance, wit, compassion...and irony' of Beethoven's bagatelles, while Liza Lim's 'At dawn I heard the tongue of the invisible' opens a song cycle *Tongue of the Invisible* inspired by the Persian mystic Hafez's poetry.

Graeme Koehne's *Powerhouse* is a fun tribute to the cartoon music of Carl Stalling; former Berlin Philharmonic viola player Brett Dean's *Viola Concerto* is a fluent masterpiece that only a virtuoso of the

instrument could write. Carl Vine's flute concerto *Pipe Dreams* is equally virtuoso in its conception of colour and form and makes a somewhat intellectual foil to the unashamedly melodic 'Wooden Ships', the second movement from Nigel Westlake's *Antarctica* suite for guitar and orchestra.

Elena Kats-Chernin's *Mythic* recalls the monumental qualities of Sculthorpe's *Kakadu*, while Ross Edward's vibrant violin concerto *Maninyas* recalls its evocations of atavistic song and dance. To end on an even lighter note, I've included Peggy Glanville-Hicks' cheeky *Thompsoniana*, which sets texts from Virgil Thomson's reviews in the style of the subjects of those same reviews!

- **Sculthorpe Kakadu**
New Zealand SO / James Judd
Naxos
- **Lumsdaine Six Postcard Pieces**
Nicky Losseff
NMC
- **Lim Tongue of the Invisible - At dawn I heard the tongue of the invisible**
Ensemble Musikfabrik
Wergo
- **Koehne Powerhouse**
Sydney SO / Takuo Yuasa
Naxos
- **Dean Viola Concerto**
Brett Dean; Sydney SO /
Simone Young
BIS
- **Vine Pipe Dreams**
Sharon Bezaly; Australian CO /
Richard Tognetti
BIS



Elena Kats-Chernin celebrates her adopted land



Janina Fialkowska is at London's Wigmore Hall on July 13 and her new ATMA Classique CD of Grieg is out soon

- **Westlake Antarctica - Wooden Ships**
Slava Grigoryan; Melbourne SO /
Nigel Westlake
ABC Classics
- **Kats-Chernin Mythic**
Tasmanian SO / Ola Rudner
Decca
- **Edwards Maninyas**
Adele Anthony; Adelaide SO / Arvo Volmer
Canary Classics
- **Glanville-Hicks Thompsoniana**
The Cantecor Trio
Equilibrium

Chopin legends

Pianist Janina Fialkowska on some of the great Chopin pianists of the past

In recent years the words 'old-fashioned' have cropped up in reviews of my Chopin discs – I regard this description as being the highest compliment, whether it was intentional or not! Chopin was a great pianist but music is an abstract art, fluid and ever-changing, and it is certainly no crime to interpret Chopin any way one desires. Some basic tenets are essential for interpretations: sentiment and not sentimentality, passion with dignity, more Classical than the prevailing, 19th-century, self-indulgent Romantic trends, well-structured and phrased, clean with no fuss – just following the score and understanding the underlying Slavic rhythms and moods. All these attributes are found in the interpretations of the pianists I have chosen – Cortot and Rosenthal actually studied with pupils of Chopin. For me the greatest Chopin interpreter was Arthur Rubinstein because he managed in all simplicity to communicate the essence of Chopin to his audiences both beautifully and powerfully.

I was lucky enough to have been taught by pupils of Cortot and a fervent disciple of

Rachmaninov and Hofmann, in addition to having Rubinstein as a mentor. I hope that some of their influences have rubbed off on my playing. Please call me 'old-fashioned'; I love it!

- **Chopin Trois nouvelles études, B130 - No 2 in A flat**
Moritz Rosenthal
La discothèque idéale de Diapason
- **Chopin Piano Sonata No 2**
Sergey Rachmaninov
Naxos Historical
- **Chopin Mazurka, Op 50 No 2**
Ignaz Friedman
La discothèque idéale de Diapason
- **Chopin Etude in C minor, Op 10 No 12, 'Révolutionnaire'**
Alfred Cortot
BnF Collection
- **Chopin Waltz Opus 34 No 1 in A flat**
Dinu Lipatti
BnF Collection
- **Chopin Waltz in A flat, Op 42**
Josef Hofmann
La discothèque idéale de Diapason
- **Chopin Nocturne, Op 27 No 2**
Arthur Rubinstein
RCA Red Seal
- **Chopin Polonaise, Op 40 No 1, 'Military'**
Arthur Rubinstein
BnF Collection
- **Chopin Barcarolle, Op 60**
Janina Fialkowska
ATMA Classique
- **Chopin Mazurka No 50, Op posth, 'Notre temps'**
Janina Fialkowska
ATMA Classique



The playlists for this feature were compiled in conjunction with

Qobuz, the music streaming service. You can listen to the playlists at gramophone.co.uk/playlists



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PERFORMANCES & EVENTS

Summer is the perfect opportunity to flock to an outdoor festival – but if you're not local to Garsington, East Neuk or Glyndebourne, you can enjoy screenings or broadcasts instead

Wormsley Estate, Buckinghamshire & selected UK public spaces

Lesley Garrett stars in *Così fan tutte* at Garsington, June 5 – July 11

Founded in 1989 at Garsington Manor near Oxford, Garsington Opera moved to the Wormsley Estate, home of the Getty family, in 2011. Three operas are presented each year at the estate's Opera Pavilion, and often include lesser-known works. Top of the bill this year though is Mozart's evergreen *Così fan tutte*, with a cast that includes Lesley Garrett as Despina, Andreea Soare as Fiordiligi and Kathryn Rudge as Dorabella. Douglas Boyd conducts, while John Fulljames directs.

This year, there will be free public screenings from July to October, including at Magdalen College Fields, Oxford, on July 2 and Westgate Fields, Louth, on July 5. The initiative is part of the Garsington Opera for All programme, which includes educational outreach work with schools local to the screening venues. garsingtonopera.org; operaforall.org

Moscow/St Petersburg & medici.tv

XV International Tchaikovsky Competition, June 15 – July 3

Launched in 1958 (and famously won by Van Cliburn), the Tchaikovsky Competition has launched some exceptional talents – most recently Daniil Trifonov, whose 'Carnegie Hall Recital' album on DG was described by *Gramophone's* Harriet Smith as 'a truly exciting debut'. This year's event, to take place across 18 days with 120 competitors in categories for violinists, pianists, cellists and singers, opens with a concert conducted by Valery Gergiev in the Great Hall of the Moscow Conservatory. Moscow will provide a base for the piano and violin categories, while St Petersburg will accommodate those for cello and voice, as well as the final Gala Concerts on July 2 and 3.

As a result of an agreement with medici.tv, 18 days' worth of nonstop free and live webcasts will be made available to worldwide audiences, via a bespoke, digital, online platform. Following each live webcast, free replays of the various rounds and concerts will be available until the next competition.

'Both amateurs and professionals of classical music are ready to join us via the internet, TV broadcasts or any other form of media communication,' said Gergiev, Co-Chair of the competition's organising committee. 'The audience wishes to be part of this adventure.' tchaikovskycompetition.com; tch15.medici.tv/en

EVENT OF THE MONTH

The Brentano Quartet play Britten at East Neuk



Various venues, East Neuk & BBC Radio 3

East Neuk Festival, June 27 – July 5

The East Neuk Festival was founded in 2004 and its concerts are held in a variety of venues throughout the East Neuk of Fife, Scotland, from small churches and caves to stately homes and gardens. In 2015, the festival enters its second decade with a programme that, alongside classical music – particularly, this year, Bach – includes jazz,

debate, photography and electronica.

In addition, for the first time in the festival's history, 10 young musicians will join the East Neuk Retreat, working together to prepare two weeks of concerts.

Of the many classical concerts scheduled, a selection will be recorded for broadcast on Radio 3 in the summer. These include two at Kilconquhar and Kilrenny churches respectively: on June 30, Philip Higham performs the Bach Cello Suite No 4, and on July 3, the Brentano Quartet plays Britten and Mendelssohn. At Crail Church on July 4, meanwhile, two more concerts will be recorded: at 11.30am, violinist Alexander Sitkovetsky and viola player Maxim Rysanov perform Mozart and Bach/Bartók duos; and at 4pm the Calidore Quartet, plus soprano Mhairi Lawson and clarinettist Maximiliano Martín, play Schubert, Golijov and Mozart.

eastneukfestival.com; bbc.co.uk/radio3

Gothenburg Concert Hall, Sweden & online

Dudamel conducts Mahler's Symphony No 1, June 18

Gustavo Dudamel conducts the Gothenburg Symphony in Mozart's charming Symphony No 9 and Mahler's Symphony No 1. Thanks to GSOPlay, which hosts free web concerts alongside interviews and behind-the-scenes material, audiences can enjoy the Gothenburg Symphony's performances wherever they live. This concert will be broadcast on June 28 and is available to watch for one month thereafter.

gso.se; gsoplay.com

LSO St Luke's & BBC Radio 3

Nicola Benedetti performs Mozart and Beethoven violin sonatas, June 25

As part of the LSO's International Violin Festival, Scottish superstar Nicola Benedetti returns to St Luke's to round off the venue's 2014/15 season of BBC Radio 3 Lunchtime Concerts with a recital of two powerful works: Mozart's Violin Sonata in E minor and, to conclude, Beethoven's virtuoso Violin Sonata No 9 in A, the *Kreutzer*. Regular partner Alexei Grynyuk accompanies.

iso.co.uk; bbc.co.uk/radio3

Théâtre de l'Archevêché, Aix-en-Provence & theoperaplatform.eu

Mozart's *Die Entführung aus dem Serail* at the Aix-en-Provence Festival, July 3-21

Mozart's three-act Singspiel is performed as

part of the Aix-en-Provence Festival, in a new production in collaboration with Musikfest Bremen. Jérémie Rhore conducts the Freiburg Baroque Orchestra along with a line-up of soloists to include Tobias Moretti as Selim Bassa and Jane Archibald as Konstanze.

On July 8, the opera can be enjoyed live via The Opera Platform, a new website which launched last month and which will broadcast and archive (for six months) full opera productions from some of Europe's leading opera companies. These include Welsh National Opera, The Royal Opera and Teatro Real Madrid.

festival-aix.com; theoperaplatform.eu

Glyndebourne & UK cinemas

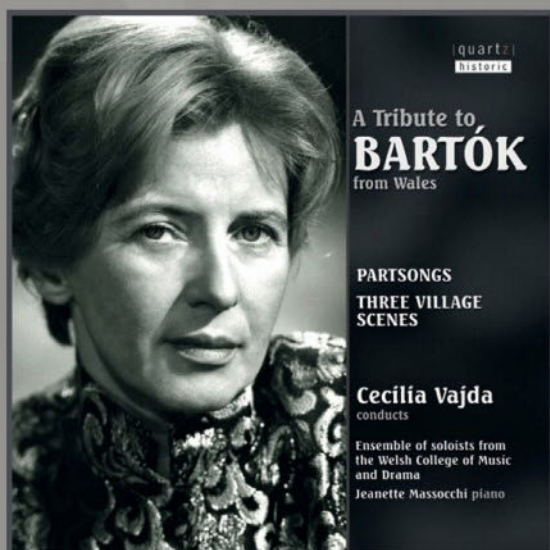
Ticciati conducts Mozart's *Die Entführung aus dem Serail*, July 19

Robin Ticciati conducts the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment in a new production directed by David McVicar with designs by Vicki Mortimer, lighting by Paule Constable and choreography by Andrew George. Sally Matthews sings Konstanze, a hugely demanding role originally composed by Mozart for celebrated Austrian soprano Caterina Cavalieri; as the composer wrote, 'I have sacrificed Konstanze's aria a little to the flexible throat of Mlle Cavalieri'. Live screenings are being shown at nearly 40 cinemas around the UK; see Glyndebourne's website for details. glyndebourne.com

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Andrew Everard,
Audio Editor

JULY TEST DISCS



Kuniko's third album for Linn is a thrilling and atmospheric recording of pieces by Xenakis, and a fine test of speed and resolution.



This LSO Nielsen recording, released as a 96kHz/24-bit download by the B&W Society of Sound, shines through a suitably accomplished system.

From personal audio to multifunction CD playback

The latest hi-fi products have something to offer almost every listener, wherever they are



The personal audio trend shows no sign of abating: sales of headphones are still booming, with upmarket models not only proving profitable for the established brands but continuing to draw in new names.

One of the latest arrivals is fashion house Ted Baker, with a range of headphones named after areas of the Shipping Forecast: the £60 in-ear model is called Dover and the £180 on-ear headphones Rockall **1** (there's also a Fastnet Bluetooth speaker and the Finisterre DAB radio), all available direct from tedbakeraudio.com. The Rockall headphones combine stainless steel with soft padding, have a folding design and a soft case for travelling, and the detachable cable comes complete with an integrated iOS remote control/microphone. They're available in brushed silver with black or tan headband and ear-cushions, or brushed champagne gold/white. The Dover earphones are of a closed-back design for noise exclusion and come with a choice of three silicon tips for ear-fitting, again with a soft case and an inline iOS remote/microphone. They're available with black cable and ear-tips in silver or 'antique brass', white/champagne gold or 'nude pink'/rose gold.

Also offering a fashion statement in the portable audio market is Astell&Kern, with a luxury version of its high-quality

digital music player design **2**. The AK240 Stainless Steel edition is a limited-run model, selling for £2499 complete with a carbon fibre back panel and a leather case from Tannerie Rémy Carriat. A&K says that as well as offering style and added durability, the stainless steel case offers improved grounding for the internal circuitry, thus eliminating more electrical noise and improving the sound of the player. Like the standard AK240, the new model has 256GB of internal memory, upgradable using a micro-SD card, and will handle 192kHz/24-bit and DSD files, as well as having built-in Wi-Fi for direct file downloads. It also has both conventional and balanced outputs.

More affordable in the digital music player market is the latest addition to the Onkyo range, the DAC-HA300 **3**. It's a battery-powered portable digital-to-analogue converter and headphone amplifier but also has a built-in media player able to accept micro-SD cards of up to 128GB. It can play files of up to 192kHz/24-bit and DSD2.8/5.6MHz, including from iOS and Android portable devices using Onkyo's HF Player app with a new free upgrade pack. An asynchronous micro-USB connection links to computers, the onboard battery is said to be good for seven hours' use and recharging is possible either from a computer or using the DC charger supplied. The Onkyo DAC-HA300 sells for £499.

Also designed for music on the move is the BTS from Californian company Noble Audio **4**. Selling for £69 and weighing just 10g, it's a Bluetooth adaptor enabling standard headphones to be used wirelessly with portable devices such as tablets and smartphones. A two-hour charge gives up to seven hours' music playback, and it has built-in play/pause and track skip controls.

We've seen a few combined CD player/network player launches of late. Now joining the fray is Arcam, with its £800 CDS27 **5**, able to play both CDs and SACDs as well as streaming music at up to 192kHz/24-bit from network storage over Wi-Fi or wired Ethernet, and provides a USB input for the connection of storage devices for playback. It uses digital-to-analogue conversion from TI/Burr Brown, and has both balanced and conventional analogue outputs, plus a digital out.

Finally this month, some neat little multichannel speakers from Quadral, in the form of the Aluma 2200 system **6** of centre speaker, four satellites and active subwoofer. The press information says that the satellite speakers have 'a coquettish yet noble appearance'(!); but, more to the point, they're compact at just under 16cm tall, solidly built in aluminium and available in either white lacquer or black anodised finish. The complete 5.1-channel system sells for £550. **6**

● REVIEW PRODUCT OF THE MONTH

Naim NAC-N 272

Combined network player/pre-amplifier/DAC offers a high-quality streaming alternative

There's rather more to the new Naim NAC-N 272 than meets the eye. At first glance, this appears to be no more than an upmarket version of the company's NAC-N 172XS network player/pre-amp, launched a couple of years back to offer newcomers and Naim enthusiasts an alternative to buying one of the company's ND- range of network player components.

As its designation suggests, the NAC-N 272, which sells for £3300, sits in the range between the NAC 202 and NAC 282 analogue pre-amplifiers as part of Naim's Classic Series – as opposed to the NAC-N 172XS, which is part of the entry-level line-up. Naim also sees it as a step up from its upmarket all-in-one system, the £3675 SuperUniti, as one might hope given that the new model and its most obvious power amp partner, the NAP 250, will set you back a shade under £6700.

To ensure the '272 fits the bill, it's built around the same DSP-based digital buffering, filtering and conversion found in the company's ND- network players, rather than the simpler solution used in the Uniti range. As well as allowing high-quality conversion, resistance to jitter and reclocking to ensure accurate conversion to analogue, the processing power available to the Naim engineers has also allowed them to move the flexibility of the product on another stage from that of its existing players.

At the heart of the NAC-N 272's digital section sits a high-power SHARC processor running Naim-written code: incoming digital signals are upconverted before being passed to the 24-bit digital-to-analogue conversion, ensuring any noise

NAIM NAC-N 272

Type Network music player/pre-amplifier

Inputs Ethernet, Wi-Fi, aptX Bluetooth, six digital inputs (three optical/three electrical), three analogue inputs (two on RCAs, one on DIN), USB/iOS

Outputs Three pre-amp level (two on DINs, one on RCAs),

line out, subwoofer, headphones, digital

Other connections Power supply input for Naim XP5 XS, XPS or 555 PS

Radio Internet radio as standard, DAB/FM via £295 optional module. Spotify Connect streaming also supported

File formats WAV and AIFF (up to 32bit/192kHz), FLAC (up to 24bit/192kHz), ALAC (up to 24bit/96kHz), WMA (up to



16bit/48kHz), Ogg Vorbis (up to 16bit/48kHz), MP3, M4A (up to 320kb/s), Playlists (M3U, PLS), DSD (DSF and DFF 64/2.8MHz). Gapless playback on MP3, M4A, AIFF, WAV, FLAC and ALAC

Accessories supplied Remote handset, antennae for Wi-Fi and Bluetooth

Dimensions (WxHxD) 43.2x8.7x31.4cm
naimaudio.com

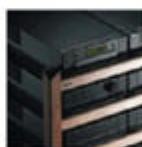
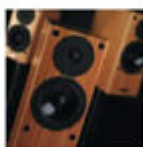
is well out of the audible band. In addition to conventional PCM-based codecs at up to 192kHz/24-bit, the new Naim can also handle the Direct Stream Digital format developed for use in SACD and now available through a number of download sources as an alternative to the more common high-resolution formats.

DSD64/DSD2.8MHz files can be played from USB memory devices via the electrical digital inputs or over a home network from a computer or NAS device, although for obvious reasons it's best to do the last of these using a wired Ethernet connection rather than the Wi-Fi the

NAC-N 272 also supports. The digital section handles DSD by integer resampling it to 40-bit/705.6kHz – again using Naim software – then feeding it to the 24-bit DAC, bypassing the digital filter for the purest signal path.

It's a capability Naim is also rolling out via a firmware upgrade to its other players and systems built around the SHARC processor: hopefully by the time this review is published, DSD playback will be available on the ND5 XS, NDX and NDS network players, and the SuperUniti all-in-one; but at the time of writing Naim engineers seemed concerned to get the

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SUGGESTED PARTNERS

The Naim combines the functions of pre-amp and network player. Here's how to build a system around it.

NAIM NAP 250.2

In order to drive speakers, the NAC-N 272 needs to be used with a power amplifier.

The obvious candidate is Naim's own NAP 250.2, a powerful partner selling for around £4000.



NAIM OVATOR S-400

The Ovator S-400 is Naim's entry-level speaker and a good combination with the NAC-N 272 and NAP 250.2. Available in a range of finishes, this floorstanding design sells for £3950/pr.



sound quality from the DSP right for these products, rather than rush out a fix they'd have to go back and amend later.

That aside, the Naim follows developments made elsewhere in the company's range in the use of decoupling strategies to exclude vibration from the main circuitboard, and the mounting of that board on strain-relieving shoulder-bolts. And while the volume adjustment

'There's nothing even slightly lazy about the sound here but the forthright presentation is never traded for refinement and subtlety'

is digitally controlled, it uses an analogue resistor ladder to adjust the level, in technology derived from the £57,000 Naim Statement NAC S1 pre-amplifier.

There are six digital inputs, plus aptX Bluetooth, and three analogue, with a selectable bypass feature on the analogue ins to allow integration with a home cinema system, and a choice of pre-amp outputs or fixed line outs, plus a subwoofer output. A DAB/DAB+/FM module can be fitted for an extra £295, a remote control is supplied, and the '272 can also be controlled by Naim's nStream app on iOS and Android devices, which also bring Spotify Connect compatibility. Finally, the pre-amp can be upgraded with the addition of Naim's XP5 XS, XPS or 555 PS external power supplies.

PERFORMANCE

Naim supplied a NAP 250 power amplifier for this review, and I also had access to XPS and 555PS power supplies, both of which brought incremental, but worthwhile, improvements to the performance of the NAC-N 272. However, the 'naked' pre-amp, powered by its internal transformer, is an extremely impressive piece of equipment, so that upgrade potential can be put to one side for now.

Used as intended, streaming music from a NAS running Twonkymedia, the Naim not only shows just how good it sounds but also allows differences to be discerned between DSD files and their high-resolution PCM-based equivalents.

In short, the former have bags of detail and a smoothness many will find appealing, while the latter prove just as informative but – at least via this player – just seem to have a little more spark and vitality. Of course, all that is likely to be of only academic interest to many listeners, so the better news is that, coupled with the NAP 250, the NAC-N 272 delivers a sound even from CD-quality files that's more than a match for all but the very best CD players and network music players.

Comparing it to my reference NDS/555PS player, both with that player connected in analogue through the NAC-N 272's analogue input and with the '272 used in fixed level mode as a player, it's clear that the NDS has more weight, more presence and delivers the music in a more captivating fashion; but then it does cost more than three times the price of the NAC-N 272, so you'd hope it would! The really good news is that the Naim pre-amp sounds much the same whichever of its inputs you use, with that usual blend of direct musical communication, power and information. It's a relatively easy listen – which will surprise those with opinions formed by the stereotypes of the Naim sound – thanks to a rich, generous and well-controlled bass, a clear, detailed midband and treble that's highly informative when it comes to laying out a picture of the recorded ambience, while at the same time smooth and clean enough never to annoy.

However, to split the sound up into those crude frequency-band descriptions does it something of a disservice, as what the NAC-N 272 does so well is present the music as a whole in a way that's at once entirely natural and similarly lacking in any sense of the mechanics behind the reproduction. Whether playing demanding choral and orchestral works or the percussive drive of Ginastera's piano concertos, the snap and attack of the Naim is never in question: there's nothing even slightly lazy about the sound here but the forthright presentation is never traded for refinement and subtlety. Best of all, the character of voices and instruments is given full expression and, despite its obvious complexity, the Naim manages to sound direct and vivid, from CD quality all the way up to the highest resolutions it can handle.

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Musical Fidelity M1 CLiC

The Naim isn't the only network audio product also able to function as a pre-amplifier, and you could start with such a device for around the £650 mark with the Musical Fidelity M1 CLiC. As well as its streaming and internet radio capability, it can be used with USB memory devices or an iOS phone or tablet, and also has two electrical digital inputs and three analogue ins, so an entire system can be connected through it to a power amplifier. For more details, visit musicalfidelity.com.



Linn Akurate DSM

Linn's streaming system has been established for many years and the company continues to expand and refine the technology it offers. The £5850 Akurate DSM is able to play music from local network sources and internet streams, works with music at up to 192kHz/24-bit and also has a wide range of digital and analogue inputs, including balanced and line analogue, optical and electrical digital, and even four HDMI inputs. Output to a power amplifier is available on both balanced and RCA phono sockets, and you can find out more at linn.co.uk.

I have to admit to being a little lukewarm when I reviewed the NAC-N 172 XS a couple of years back (11/12), and wondering whether it suffered from the 'neither fish nor fowl' syndrome. The NAC-N 272 shows all the benefits of its manufacturer's continued research and development into audio both digital and analogue, and is all the better for it.

REVIEW MUSICAL FIDELITY MERLIN/ROUNDTABLE

Audio sorcery from Merlin and the Roundtable

British company comes up with a different spin on the all-in-one computer music system

Do you consider yourself a civilian? If so, the new Musical Fidelity system could be just the thing for you. Company founder Antony Michaelson explains that while audiophiles and other hi-fi enthusiasts are well served by his company's mainstream products, which currently extend all the way up to the Nu-Vista 800 integrated amplifier, the new Merlin 1 system is aimed at what he calls 'civilians' – the kind of people who want good sound but wouldn't usually find themselves anywhere near a conventional hi-fi shop.

So what's needed to bring those listeners back into the fold? Like other manufacturers, Musical Fidelity is tackling the task with a compact amplifier able to take an input from a computer via USB, or via aptX Bluetooth from smartphones, tablets and the like, as well as having both conventional digital and analogue inputs. It delivers 40W per channel, has selector switches to switch between line and phono on the single set of RCA phono inputs, and low-level line-in or optical digital input on a 3.5mm combination socket, a choice of fixed or variable output on another 3.5mm socket (so you could add a subwoofer) and a decent headphone amplifier built in.

The amplifier is available as a package with the matching Merlin 1 loudspeakers for £799. These speakers, also available separately at £299/pr, are of a novel design – and not just due to their ovoid shape, available in gloss black, red or silver. They use a single 6cm full-range Balanced Mode Radiator drive unit, its bass tuned with a rear-venting port, and this sits in a novel stepped front baffle, using concentric rings of seemingly random protrusions to control the dispersion of the sound from the drive unit. The speakers have an integral stand/foot, which can be switched between two mounting-points to give a horizontal or vertical orientation, and come complete with cables to connect them to the amplifier.

The other element of the system, continuing the Arthurian theme and also playing to the recent revival of interest in vinyl playback, is the Roundtable – a two-speed belt-drive turntable selling for £599 complete with fitted arm and cartridge, or £1299 as a package complete with the amplifier and speakers. It comes in a choice of black or red gloss finishes and



SPECIFICATION

MERLIN 1 AMPLIFIER AND SPEAKERS

Price £799 (speakers only £299/pr)

Inputs Line/MM phono, line/optical digital, USB, Bluetooth

Outputs One pair of speakers, line/pre-out/optical digital, headphones

Amplifier power 40Wpc into 4 ohms, 50Wpc peak

Speaker drive unit/enclosure 6cm BMR, port-loaded extruded enclosure

Power handling 15-75W

Impedance 4 ohms nominal

Amplifier dimensions (WxHxD) 22x5.5x24cm

Speaker dimensions (WxHxD, 'horizontal' orientation) 22x12.5x20cm

Accessories supplied Remote handset, Bluetooth antenna, speaker cables

ROUNDTABLE TURNTABLE

Price £599

Type Belt-drive, DC motor, MDF plinth and platter

Speeds 33.3/45rpm

Accessories supplied Audio Technica AT95E cartridge (pre-installed), felt mat, interconnects, cartridge alignment protractor and balance

Dimensions (WxHxD, inc arm and terminals) 48.2x10x34.2cm

musicalfidelity.com

uses a solid plinth and high-density MDF platter with a felt mat, and a high-carbon tooled steel main bearing placed at the whole unit's centre of gravity.

The power switch is hidden under the front edge of the plinth and the turntable comes complete with white gloves to avoid contamination while fitting the belt, and an alignment protractor and balance should you want to change the cartridge.

PERFORMANCE

Given the compact size of the components here – well, the turntable of course is full-size, but the amplifier is just 22cm wide, with the speakers the same size in horizontal orientation – one might expect the sound of the Merlin system to be very much small-scale. Far from it: although this isn't a system I'd choose to fill cavernous spaces, it's more than up to the job of playing music at very enjoyable levels in most modern living-rooms, and would also make a perfect 'second-room' system.

Most remarkable is the way this little system can fill a room with sound, thanks to the decent amount of power available from the amp and those novel speakers: used 'horizontal' they offer a sound with

excellent imaging and a broad, 'outside the box' sound stage, while in their 'vertical' orientation there's a tighter focus but a less expansive sonic picture.

It's handy to have the speakers within a foot or two of a rear wall to make the most of their rear port loading – they can sound a bit thin when used out in free space – but I never once found myself tempted to haul in a subwoofer to fill out the bass, as the overall presentation here is well balanced, substantial and totally at odds with the almost toy-like appearance of the speakers. While this system did little to dispel my feelings that Bluetooth has its shortcomings and that its main appeal is convenience, not sound quality, its analogue input and wired USB – despite being limited to 16-bit resolution and 44.1/48kHz – proved rather more persuasive and allowed a wide variety of music to be played in an extremely enjoyable fashion.

As an attractive combination of novelty and hi-fi fundamentals, the Merlin system and its partnering Roundtable turntable are both eye-catching on first acquaintance and satisfying over extended listening. They deserve to do well. **G**



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● ESSAY

Is the time right for a DSD revival?

The technology behind the Super Audio CD, far from being consigned to history, is making something of a comeback and is well worth exploring

Asked whether his company's future products would support DSD, Linn Technical Director Keith Robertson was pretty scathing. He suggested that while the format was a solution when it was launched back in 1999 as the technology behind the Super Audio CD, things have moved on and these days DSD is no more than a distraction. The oft-quoted Wikipedia seems to agree, saying that 'Having made little impact in the consumer audio market, by 2007 SACD was deemed to be a failure by the press. A small market for SACD has remained, serving the audiophile community.'

Pretty damning stuff; but the fact remains that SACD still has a presence in the market, with a number of labels – including Linn, Channel Classics, Pentatone, CPO, 2L, some orchestras' 'house' labels and more – persisting with the technology. In Japan, where SACD never really went away, there's a much greater appetite for releases in the format; and of course there's a good range of hardware on which to play the discs, from machines from original co-promoter Sony to a variety of CD/SACD players and Blu-ray-based universal disc hardware.

However, there's a new twist in what some may have thought a saga long ago told, finished and forgotten – the re-emergence of DSD as a format in the 'computer audio' arena. Just as one example, in this issue there's the new Naim network music pre-amp, the NAC-N 272, which will play DSD files from local or network storage, and Naim's statement of intent is to extend that capability to a number of its other products.

Then there's the recent 'proof of concept' project carried out by a consortium including the Internet Initiative Japan, pro-audio company Korg and Sony, involving the live streaming of concerts in



A new life for old PlayStation3 consoles? Certain early versions are the only way to copy SACDs for network playback

'double-DSD' quality over the internet. An all-day concert series was streamed from Tokyo Bunka Kaikan Recital Hall as part of the city's Spring Festival, while the following weekend saw a live relay from Berlin of *La damnation de Faust*.

'There's a new twist in the saga – the re-emergence of DSD as a format in the "computer audio" arena'

Not only did these semi-experimental 'broadcasts' work, they also delivered sound quality previously unimaginable from a live relay, making existing methods such as conventional radio and even some subscription services sound rather pinched and uninteresting by comparison. Listening at home over headphones and also through my main hi-fi system, I felt as if I was sharing the sense of wonder early listeners must have had back in the first part of the last century, when an enterprising

telephone company put its handsets across the front of theatre stages and for the first time subscribers could hear a performance in their own homes. At a time when we're being bombarded with streaming services ranging from the compressed to CD-quality and beyond, what I heard from the Tokyo and Berlin concerts was something new, amazing and exciting, and more than enough to have one imagining its future potential.

But what if you want to enjoy music in DSD as you do with CDs stored on a home network? Well, there are solutions: a few sources, including the ever-resourceful 2L, offer DSD downloads; Sony's latest network systems will store and play DSD files (and even up-convert existing CDs to the format, as it believes this enables them to sound better); and you can even rip SACD discs to DSD files, able to be played either by machines such as the Naim

or by computers connected to your hi-fi via a DSD-capable digital-to-analogue converter (as an increasing number of converters now are).

For this, you'll need what some believe to be another relic from the past: the original Sony PlayStation3 games console, and only early versions at that: this can be loaded with an SACD ripper package to extract DSD as files you can store on a computer and play through suitable hardware. That's how I've been feeding my DSD habit of late, copying releases old and new to my network storage just as I do standard CDs. For those interested, I'll put a piece on the *Gramophone* website going into more detail, and with links to helpful websites.

And just in case you think this is a minority interest, as Wikipedia would have you believe, it's illuminating to discover just how tricky it is to get hold of a decent example of a suitable PS3, and to watch the way prices of these machines have been climbing of late. **G**

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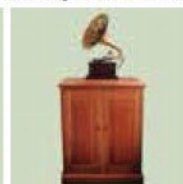
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NOTES & LETTERS

Modern Tristan productions • The art of listening • Gundula Janowitz on disc

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In praise of Janowitz

I was interested to read Elizabeth Watts's article on Gundula Janowitz in your June issue (page 62) and to concur with her enthusiasm for Janowitz's glorious recording of Richard Strauss's *Four Last Songs* with Karajan. Strauss of course wrote other songs with orchestral accompaniment which, although not as well known as the *Four Last Songs*, are nevertheless superb pieces. In November 2012 Virgin Classics (now Erato) issued a disc on their bargain Red Line label which includes several of these, magnificently sung by Janowitz, but this disc seems to have received little publicity or review. Also of particular note is a five-disc set from DG ('Gundula Janowitz: The Golden Voice') containing many of her best recordings and extensively reviewed by James Jolly in your April 2006 issue (page 69).

I was somewhat surprised to see Elizabeth Watts refer to Janowitz as possibly a 'Marmite' singer – greatly admired by many, but much disliked by others. I find the latter hard to believe!

Incidentally, it is interesting to note that Janowitz and Edith Mathis have probably been heard by more people than any other classical singers in history. This by virtue of their recording of Mozart's 'Che soave zeffiretto' from *The Marriage of Figaro* being used for the famous prison yard scene in *The Shawshank Redemption*, one of the most popular films ever made.

Eric Bareham

West Wittering, Chichester

Troubling Tristan stagings

I much enjoyed Hugo Shirley's feature on *Tristan und Isolde* (June, page 10). I am surprised that he offered no criticism



Gundula Janowitz – a 'Marmite' singer?

Letter of the Month



Harpist Catrin Finch: 'What's important is that children learn to appreciate and enjoy music'

Nurturing the art of listening

I was interested to read the Editor's views expressed in 'Learning to Listen' (June, page 3, and at gramophone.co.uk), something I have been promoting for more years than I care to remember!

We are continually bombarded with sound, whether in the local supermarket and as background music to TV programmes, and we have a generation which has never been taught how to listen and is so used to continuous sound that it is often actually afraid of silence.

When I first became a music teacher in Liverpool in the 1960s there was an abundance of pop groups. The challenge was to broaden the horizons for my pupils, not by excluding the music they loved but by teaching them to listen to a wider variety of music. As I explained to them, we were all fortunate enough to be able to hear sounds but listening was something different. To this day I feel proud that these children took this on board and were equally at home at the Philharmonic or in the Cavern.

Now I am at the other end of the spectrum, trying to keep a music society with a long and distinguished history going with a small and devoted audience who really know how to listen. The power of their concentration conveys itself to the performers who have often commented on the inspiration this brings to their performances. But we need young people to join us if we are to have a future.

Catrin Finch was right when she stresses the importance of children sitting down and enjoying music; they are the future. Unless this happens the vicious circle will continue and we will join the numerous other societies which have been forced to close down, depriving future generations of opportunities to listen to our amazing musical heritage and limiting performance opportunities for musicians and composers.

Christine Talbot-Cooper
Gloucester Music Society

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Please send letters responding to articles in this issue for consideration for publication in the August issue by June 23. Gramophone reserves the right to edit all letters for publication.

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of the abstract productions offered nowadays. The arrogance of modern producers in completely ignoring Wagner's scenarios I find astounding. Please check out the Opus Arte DVDs of the Barcelona production. A fine performance with decent scenery.

I was lucky enough to be at Bayreuth in 1974 and saw Carlos Kleiber conduct the work (with Helge Brilioth and Catarina Ligendza) with marvellous production and sets by August Everding and Josef Svoboda. An unforgettable experience! This performance is available (in poor sound) from Opera d'Oro and gives an idea of Kleiber's performance.

I have seen the Covent Garden, Glyndebourne and ENO productions in the last few years with no scenery to speak of. Disappointing.

Peter Moule, via email

CPE Bach premiere?

While appreciatively reading the *Gramophone* Collector feature on CPE Bach in the March issue (page 32), I was surprised to find a reference to the 'world premiere recording' of *Die letzten Leiden des Erlösers*. I have had a recording in my CD collection for over 20 years in a fine performance by Collegium Vocale Gent and La Petite Band under the direction of Sigiswald Kuijken (Deutsche Harmonia Mundi). It features, of course, period instruments and such cream-of-the-crop early music vocalists of the time as Barbara Schlick, Christoph Prégardien, and Max van Egmond. Ah well, recordings come and recordings go. It was a most informative feature article though, and I have taken the plunge to purchase the Markovina recordings of Bach's keyboard works, having been introduced to his

quirky style some years ago by a Pletnev recital on DG and more recently enjoying the Spányi series on BIS.

*David O Berger
St Louis, MO USA*

Don't forget Kletzki

As the proud owner of many fine recordings by the Suisse Romande Orchestra, I was puzzled not to see Paul Kletzki included in your list of past chief conductors ('Jonathan Nott to head the Orchestre de la Suisse Romande', gramophone.co.uk). I believe he was Artistic Director after Ansermet until 1970. His glorious Decca record of Rachmaninov's Second Symphony (1968) remains one of my treasured possessions.

*Dave Kruger
Nantwich, Cheshire*

Gerontius from the archives

Note: the following letter relates to a note in the June issue from David R Hoffman concerning the BBC's telecast of Boult conducting The Dream of Gerontius in 1968.

The BBC's telecast of Sir Adrian Boult's conducting of Elgar's *The Dream of Gerontius* made in 1968 from Canterbury Cathedral is being considered for future release by ICA Classics. The quality on the whole is reasonable and can certainly be improved upon. The film itself combines many elements of the Cathedral with action shots of the artists, with an emphasis on the former. It is an important document and as Robert Hoffman has said in his letter, the individual contributions of Peter Pears, Dame Janet Baker and John Shirley-Quirk are all outstanding under Boult's masterly conducting.

*John Pattrick
Head of Audio, ICA Classics*

OBITUARIES

A record producer; a renowned harp maker, two members of the Dartington Quartet

PAUL MYERS

*Record producer
Born July 17, 1932
Died May 1, 2015*



Though a lawyer by training, Myers moved to New York to work with the Kapp record label where he was persuaded to produce his first

recording. He also broadcast for *The Kapp Hour* on the radio in New York: this led to an approach in 1962 from CBS's Schuyler Chapin and soon Myers was producing recordings by George Szell (including the complete Brahms and Beethoven symphonies and Szell's classic Mahler Fourth), the Juilliard Quartet, Glenn Gould, Charles Rosen, Rudolf Serkin and many others. In 1968 he returned to the UK to head up CBS's British arm and produced a vast number of discs in London with the likes of Pierre Boulez, Pinchas Zukerman, André Previn, Isaac Stern, Andrew Davis, Daniel Barenboim and Murray Perahia (including the complete Mozart piano concertos with the ECO) as well as 25 opera sets, among which was a complete Puccini series.

He moved to Decca in 1980 and worked with musicians like Alicia de Larrocha, Sir Georg Solti and Vladimir Ashkenazy. After retiring from Decca in 1995 he undertook freelance producing work including Manuel Rosenthal's version of Offenbach's *Gaîté Parisienne* under the 92-year-old Rosenthal for Naxos (earning a *Gramophone* Editor's Choice).

In a *Gramophone* profile in September 1974, Myers was described as 'one of the most unassuming and charming of men, yet with a razor-sharp mind'. A stylish and perceptive writer, Myers wrote a biography of Leonard Bernstein (Phaidon: 1998) as well as a series of novels set in the classical music world with the agent (and former secret agent) Mark Holland as their protagonist.

PETER CROPPER

*Violinist
Born November 19, 1945
Died May 30, 2015*

Peter Cropper, the first violin of the Lindsay Quartet, has died; he was 69.



Paul Kletzki: led the Orchestra de la Suisse Romande from 1966 to 1970



He was also the founding Artistic Director of Sheffield's Music in the Round.

Cropper, with Ronald Birks (second violin), Roger Bigley (viola) and Bernard Gregor-Smith (cello), formed the quartet at the Royal Academy of Music in 1965 – initially to compete for a prize. Once established, they were appointed Leverhulme Scholars at Keele University (at which point they took their name from the University's founder, Lord Lindsay). They also held posts as quartet-in-residence at both Sheffield and Manchester universities. The Lindsays recorded extensively for ASV: their set of the Late Quartets of Beethoven brought them a *Gramophone* Award in 1984.

The Lindsays retired in 2005, after 39 years of performing together. After parting, Cropper performed as soloist, recording the Beethoven sonatas for piano and violin with Martin Roscoe (also for ASV), and in a piano trio with Moray Welsh and Roscoe. He also taught an MA course in string quartet performance at Sheffield University.

ALEXANDER KOK

Cellist

Born February 14 1926

Died May 1 2015



One of the founding members of the Philharmonia, Kok was also the cellist in the Dartington Quartet alongside Colin Sauer (see below). After study at

the Royal Academy of Music, Kok joined the Boyd Neel Orchestra before, in 1945, joining Walter Legge's Philharmonia. He studied with the cellists Pierre Fournier and Pablo Casals at this time before moving, in 1957, to Devon to join the Dartington College of Arts where he founded the Dartington Quartet.

Kok returned to London and became Principal Cellist of the BBC Symphony Orchestra, leaving in 1965 after disagreements over the BBC's music policy. He undertook freelance session work appearing, among many other projects, on George Harrison's album 'Cloud Nine'. After an unhappy experience at the newly created Cheltenham Music School he moved to France where he lived until two years before his death. His brother Felix was Leader of the City of Birmingham

Symphony Orchestra. He wrote a memoir, *A Voice in the Dark*, in 2003.

COLIN SAUER

Violinist

Born July 13, 1924

Died January 9, 2015

A musician of early promise, Sauer won a scholarship, aged 10, to the Guildhall School of Music. A fine sportsman, he had to abandon a possible career in tennis when war intervened, and then a strained ligament put paid to his ambitions. At 16 he attended the Royal Academy of Music where he played Lalo's *Symphonie espagnole* under Sir Henry Wood's baton. He then played in Boult's BBC SO and Barbirolli's Hallé as well as second violin in the Aeolian Quartet.

In 1958, along with Alexander Kok (see above), Peter Carter and Keith Lovell, he founded the Dartington Quartet. The quartet performed together for 22 years and recorded extensively, earning a fine reputation for its performances of modern music.

Based in the West Country, Sauer was Leader of the Bristol Sinfonia, he also performed in the Academy of St Martin the Fields and in the Bournemouth Sinfonietta during the period it was the 'pit' orchestra for Glyndebourne on tour.

A recording, long thought lost, of Douglas Coates's Violin Concerto with Sauer as soloist with the BBC Northern Orchestra conducted by Charles Groves was released by Divine Art in 2006.



Colin Sauer: violinist of the Dartington Quartet

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











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Edward Watson

The Royal Ballet Principal on working with singers, learning to appreciate Schoenberg, and the thrill of getting 'inside' the music

My first encounter with classical music was in ballet class – I still remember those lessons in Longfield, Kent, with Mrs Richards at the piano. At home, though, it was all about pop music. We had a record player, and my dad would play Buddy Holly – he was a big fan. My sister loved Wham! and my brother was into the Beastie Boys. As for me, the first single I bought was the Band Aid one – I remember going into Woolworths to get it. Growing up, the only classical music we heard was on a couple of cassettes my mum would play in the car.

When I joined the Royal Ballet School, everything changed. I learned to read music, and we were taken to a lot of concerts. Different people came in on Sundays to give recitals – I remember seeing the jazz singer Marion Montgomery and the percussionist Evelyn Glennie. We went to plays and ballets – the option was always there for us to learn and be inspired. Nowadays, of course, being based at the Royal Opera House, I get to see a lot of things – *Salome*, *Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District*...dark stuff!

On a typical day, I'm surrounded by music. When I get up, I put on the radio; on the bus on my way into work, I listen to my iPod; for rehearsals, we have piano accompaniment; for the show there's a live orchestra; and then, on my way home, I'll listen to my iPod again. Occasionally I might want silence, but music is great – it can change your mood, bring you up or down and prepare you for a performance.

At the moment, I'm listening to Martha Wainwright and also *Song of the Earth* – we're rehearsing Kenneth MacMillan's ballet, set to Mahler's score, so I'm definitely having a Mahler moment right now. In *Song of the Earth*, having the singers on stage with the dancers gives the ballet an extra dimension. It's the same with *Gloria*, another MacMillan ballet, set to Poulenc's choral work. For me, this is one of the most moving examples of how choreography can enhance the score. The music is about praising God, yet you're seeing these images of the horrors of the First World War. That juxtaposition is what makes it so heartbreaking, and I find that, being surrounded by voices on stage, I breathe with them.

Without a doubt, my dance repertoire has influenced what I listen to. Schoenberg, Webern, Philip Glass...these are composers I wouldn't naturally have been drawn to but somehow, when you're moving to this music, you get an appreciation for it – of being inside it and interpreting through it. I've recently become familiar with Philip Glass's Violin Concerto, which Alastair Marriott has used for his new work *Zeitgeist* – myself and Natalia Osipova are premiering it at the Coliseum in July, as part of the Ardani 25 Dance Gala.



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The Balcony Scene feels like the soundtrack to my life. I've danced it with loads of different and wonderful Juliets and this reminds me of them.

I can understand why choreographers like Glass's music – it's got a real drive to it and that energy is very appealing.

Working on *The Winter's Tale* with Christopher Wheeldon and Joby Talbot last year was a creative time for everyone involved. Joby was in the studio while we rehearsed, changing, extending or tweaking the score as necessary. To be a choreographer, though, you have to be as passionate about that as dancing – for me, being the interpreter is what I love.

It can be frustrating when the music is right but the choreography doesn't express it – you can find yourself in a situation where you're thinking, 'I have to marry these two things together'. The flip side is when everything just works and there's this synergy between the two elements. The last performance I did of *Mayerling* – with MacMillan's steps and Liszt's music – was one of those occasions where it all came together. I didn't have to worry about the tempo at all – I wasn't pushed by the orchestra, I wasn't hanging on... I just didn't have to think about it. It was an emotional and exhilarating experience, and I'll never forget it. **G**

Edward Watson performs at the Coliseum on July 17 and 18 – visit eno.org; Watson joins Wendy Whelan for 'Other Stories' at the Linbury Theatre, July 9-12 – visit rob.org.uk



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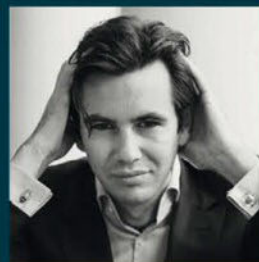
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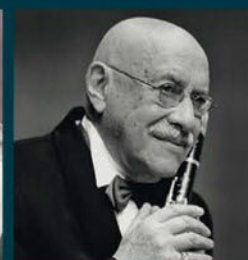
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